NATION

Gujarat becomes 2nd state to table UCC Bill

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Investors get rich by Rs 7.56L cr as mkt jumps 2%

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Security beefed up at Chinnaswamy ahead of IPL

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 25 MARCH 2026 | WEDNESDAY | BENGALURU | 5 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 73 | Pages: 8

RCB sold for record Rs 16,660 crore to Birla-led group

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Swiggy United Spirits Limited on Tuesday announced the sale of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) in an all-cash deal worth Rs 16,660 crore, making it the most expensive franchise in Indian Premier League history. The franchise has been sold to a consortium comprising Aditya Birla Group, The Times of India Group, Bolt Ventures, backed by David Blitzer, and Blackstone Inc.. The deal includes 100 per cent stake in Royal Challengers Sports Pvt Ltd, which operates RCB teams in both IPL and WPL. RCB, featuring Virat Kohli, won their maiden IPL title in 2025 and have been runners-up thrice. Founded in 2008 by Vijay Mallya, the franchise later came under Diageo. The sale follows a strategic review by USL and comes months after a stampede near the M Chinnaswamy Stadium that claimed 11 lives. RCB won their first title in 2025 and finished as the runners-up on three occasions -2009, 2011, and 2016. —*PTI*

Govt will not table women's quota bill this Parl session

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The government is unlikely to introduce a bill to implement 33 per cent women reservation in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Parliament session, which may be adjourned early but not prorogued, sources said. The proposed amendment to the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam would increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816, reserving 273 for women, including SC/ST allocations, based on the 2011 census. A separate bill will amend the Delimitation Act. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has consulted NDA allies, but talks with Congress and TMC are pending. The reservation will come into effect after delimitation, impacting the next Lok Sabha and assembly elections in Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Andhra Pradesh. The laws are expected to be enforced by 31 March 2029. The government is considering reconvening the session post-five assembly polls, with results declared on 4 May.—*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 3

'Zero FIR' lodged in City over Ajit 'suspicious' death

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Bengaluru Police have registered a Zero FIR over the death of Ajit Pawar in a January 28 plane crash near Baramati, following a complaint by nephew Rohit Pawar alleging a "larger criminal conspiracy". The Bombardier Learjet 45, operated by VSR Ventures Private Limited, crashed while flying from Mumbai, killing all five onboard. The FIR has been transferred to Maharashtra Police for detailed investigation. Rohit alleged safety violations flagged by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, including an unairworthy aircraft nearing overhaul limits, falsified records, and irregular certification processes. He also questioned last-minute crew changes and pilot conduct, citing possible alcohol-related issues. He further flagged unexplained delays, runway changes and operational lapses, claiming the pattern pointed to negligence or deliberate wrongdoing.—*PTI*

LS passes Transgender Bill preventing self-identification

People from the LGBTQ+ community take part in a rally against Transgender (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in Kolkata —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

- Opposition sought inclusion of diverse sexual orientation arguing the bill restricts self-determination and demanded referral to a committee.

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, amid opposition criticism over the exclusion of gay and lesbian individuals.

Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said the amendment aims to protect persons facing societal discrimination due to biological issues, ensuring continued legal recognition and safeguards for transgender individuals. He highlighted that while the 2019 law allowed a maximum two-year jail term for certain offences, the amendment proposes up to 14 years' imprisonment with penalties.

Opposition members sought inclusion of diverse sexual orientations, arguing the bill restricts self-determination and demanded referral to a parliamentary standing committee. The bill explicitly excludes "different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities" from its scope, defining transgender persons as those with socio-cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, aravani, jogta, eunuchs, intersex persons, or individuals with congenital variations at birth.

The bill also provides for the designation of an authority, a medical board led by a chief or deputy chief medical officer, to seek expert advice if required. It introduces specific offences with graded punishments reflecting the severity of harm, irreversibility of injury, and vulnerability of child victims.

The government defended the legislation, stating it aims to provide precise identification and protection for transgender persons while excluding other gender identities and sexual orientations from its ambit. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

PM, Trump talk on opening of Hormuz

Govt calls for all-party meet, RaGa to skip

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

US President Donald Trump called Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a first since the war started —*ANI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said maintaining an open and secure Strait of Hormuz is vital for global shipping, following a phone conversation with US President Donald Trump. The discussion, the first since tensions escalated in West Asia, focused on de-escalation and restoring peace at the earliest.

"India supports efforts for de-escalation and peace," Modi said to Trump.

Officials said the discussion underscored India's outreach aimed at ending hostilities as soon as possible and ensuring the unimpeded flow of energy through the Hormuz shipping lane. New Delhi is especially concerned about the ramifications for the country's food, fuel and fertiliser security if the crisis persists.

The call comes amid reports that Pakistan may mediate talks between the US and Iran. The Central government has convened an all-party meeting on the West Asia crisis on Wednesday, likely chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in attendance. Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi will miss the meeting due to prior commitments. Modi, addressing Rajya Sabha earlier in the day, announced the constitution of seven empowered groups to deal with the potential long term impacts of the West Asia conflict. He urged state governments to adopt a "Team India" approach to mitigate the crisis and warned against black marketing and hoarding of essential commodities.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-25

Comparing the current situation to the unprecedented challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Prime Minister admitted the war is disrupting supplies of crude oil, gas and fertilisers, and stressed that self reliance is the only option going forward.

To secure energy supplies amid disruptions in the Hormuz region, Modi said India is sourcing oil and gas from all possible global avenues, and efforts will continue to ensure that the common people are not adversely affected. India imports nearly 40–50 per cent of its urea and DAP fertilisers from West Asia. Domestic urea plants are operating at reduced capacity, reportedly around 60%, due to shortages of LNG, a key feedstock primarily sourced from Gulf suppliers. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 3, 4 ,5, 6, 7

No clarity on deleted voters in WB's SIR supplementary list

KOLKATA, 24 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) has yet to disclose the number of voters whose names have been included or deleted following the SIR adjudication process in West Bengal, despite publishing the first supplementary list. The booth-wise list was uploaded on the EC's website around midnight. Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal said that he could not clarify the figures at this stage, stating, "I do not have any figures at the moment and cannot say how many names have been deleted. The process is still underway."

Approximately 60 lakh names were marked as "under adjudication" in the final voters' list published on 28 February.

Following this, 705 judicial officers were engaged to determine whether these names would be retained or deleted, in line with Supreme Court directives. The supplementary list contains voters' names whose cases have been adjudicated.

Agarwal stated on Monday evening that around 29 lakh names had been adjudicated so far. An official from the CEO's office said the total number of inclusions or deletions will be announced soon.

Voters have been asked to check their status via booth-level lists and those whose names are deleted can appeal within 15 days before designated tribunals. Security has been heightened across the state ahead of the list's publication. Polls for West Bengal assembly are scheduled for 23 and 29 April, with counting on 4 May. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

'Only Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists can claim SC status'

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

- It said, "A person cannot simultaneously profess and practice a religion other than the ones specified in Clause 3 of Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that individuals lose their Scheduled Caste (SC) status upon converting from Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism to any other religion.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and NV Anjaria upheld an Andhra Pradesh High Court order, stating that SC status is immediately and completely forfeited upon conversion. "No statutory benefit, protection, reservation, or entitlement under the Constitution or laws can be claimed by those not deemed members of a Scheduled Caste," the bench said.

The case arose after pastor Chinthada Anand, who had converted to Christianity, filed a criminal complaint invoking the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, alleging assault and threats over caste-related disputes. The Andhra Pradesh High Court ruled that caste distinctions do not apply to Christianity, and therefore he could not claim SC protections.

The Supreme Court noted that Anand continued to practice Christianity and conduct pastoral duties for over a decade, including holding regular Sunday prayers. The court emphasised that the bar on SC benefits for converts to religions outside Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism is "absolute" and allows no exceptions.

The decision reinforces the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, which explicitly links SC status to specific religions. The ruling clarifies that conversion to any other faith, without re-conversion or acceptance back into the original community, automatically disqualifies individuals from SC entitlements, including reservation and legal protections. —*PTI*

K'taka Assembly Session curtailed by a day

CM Siddaramaiah and Speaker UT Khader during the inauguration of the renovated western entrance of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly's Budget session has been shortened by a day and is now set to conclude on 26 March instead of 27 March. The decision was reportedly made because of upcoming by-elections for two Assembly seats in the state.

The session began on 6 March with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presenting the Budget for 2026-27. Speaker UT Khader announced in the House that, following a meeting of the Legislative Assembly's Business Advisory Committee (BAC), "As per the decision of the BAC, discussion on the Budget and demands will conclude today (24 March). The CM will reply to these discussions on 26 March, after which the Appropriation Bill will be discussed and passed. After transacting business on 26 March, the House will be adjourned sine die." The bypolls for Bagalkot and Davangere South are scheduled for 9 April prompted by the deaths of senior Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

'NO REFUND FOR RLY TICKET CANCELLED UP TO 8 HRS BEFORE DEPARTURE'

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

There will be no refund for cancellation of train tickets up to eight hours before departure, instead of the existing four hours.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said this on Tuesday while announcing reforms in the sector. The new refund rule will take effect between April 1 and 15 this year.

Other refund slabs have also been revised. A cancellation between 24 and eight hours will now incur a 50 per cent deduction from the ticket cost. This is currently 12 to four hours.

Similarly, the Railways will deduct 25 per cent of the ticket cost for cancellation between 72 and 24 hours before departure.

A full refund -- except a flat cancellation charge per passenger -- will be given for cancellations made more than 72 hours before the train's departure.

Vaishnaw said the refund rule is being modified to discourage black marketing and last-minute sale of tickets by agents.

The minister further said that to prevent agents and touts from hoarding tickets, various changes have been made to the Tatkal booking system, including Aadhaar-based OTP, booking restriction on agents for the first 30 minutes, and deployment of an anti-bot solution to filter non-genuine users. —*PTI*

UP'S LONI TOPS THE LIST

India is world's 6th most polluted country

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

India is the sixth most-polluted country when it comes to levels of fine particulate matter, a major air pollutant, while UP's Loni is the most polluted city across the globe and Delhi is at the fourth spot.

This has been the finding of the World Air Quality Report, 2025 about India. The eighth edition of the report published by IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, analysed data from monitoring stations across 9,446 cities in 143 countries, regions and territories.

According to the report, Pakistan is the most polluted country, followed by Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Chad and Congo, with India at the sixth spot.

Among the ten most polluted cities across the globe, five are from India—Loni, Byrnihat, Delhi, Ghaziabad and Ula. "The world's 25 most polluted cities were all located in India, Pakistan and China, with India home to three of the four most polluted. Loni, India, was the most polluted city, recording an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 112.5 µg/m³—a nearly 23 per cent increase from 2024 and more than 22 times the WHO guideline," the report said.

"Only 14 per cent of global cities met the World Health Organization (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline of 5 µg/m³, down from 17 per cent the previous year. Only thirteen countries/territories met the WHO annual average PM2.5 guideline—French Polynesia, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Barbados, New Caledonia, Iceland, Bermuda, Réunion, Andorra, Australia, Grenada, Panama, Estonia," the report said.

Aidan Farrow, Senior Scientist, Greenpeace International, said, "This open, transparent data is an essential tool for holding polluters accountable and securing a healthy environment for everyone." —*PTI*

—ANI

Mobile Passport Seva van to operate in Kodagu

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

A Mobile Passport Seva van will operate in Madikeri town of Kodagu district in the State from 8 to 10 April, offering on-the-spot passport services to applicants. The van will operate at Gandhi Bhavana in Madikeri town under an initiative launched by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to take passport services to people in underserved areas by facilitating document verification and biometric data collection closer to their homes, the Regional Passport Office, Bengaluru, said in a statement. Applicants may book appointments online at the Passport Seva portal under the normal scheme. After payment, they should select the 'mobile van' option while scheduling the appointment, the statement said. —*PTI*

—PIB

5 held with MDMA, ganja worth Rs 5 crore in City

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Five individuals have been arrested for allegedly trafficking banned narcotics MDMA and ganja across various parts of the City, police confirmed on Tuesday. Police seized 3.912kg of ganja, 343 grams of MDMA, and 170gm of other narcotic substances, along with a goods vehicle and a mobile phone, with an estimated worth of Rs 5.77 crore. The operation was carried out recently by the Narcotics Wing of the Central Crime Branch in collaboration with local Bengaluru city police, based on credible intelligence reports. Ganja was being transported near Nayandahalli signal on Mysuru Road in the city, while MDMA and ganja were stored and sold from lodges in RK Puram and Channasandra Main Road. Police are trying to trace the suppliers of the narcotic substances while the accused have been sent to judicial custody after produced in court. —*PTI*

Hotel owner dies by suicide in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 24 MARCH

A 65-year-old hotel owner, Ramachandra Shankar Halluri, committed suicide at his eatery in Hukkeri district, police confirmed today. Halluri, who ran 'Hanuman Hotel' near the old bus stand for 16 years, was reportedly suffering from severe financial distress. He had been grappling with business losses over the past four to five years and was burdened with approximately Rs 11 lakh in debt, struggling to meet expenses including rent and loan repayments. On Tuesday morning, he opened the hotel at around 6am and was later found hanging inside. Police officials stated the main reason was financial burden from loans. They denied rumours about gas supply issues, confirming the cylinder was functional. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

CLASSIFIED

CLOSING DOWN SALE
RAYMOND DISCOUNT SHOP
PICK ANY ITEM Rs. 500/- only
2 Nos. Raymond T/W Pant Pc
2 Nos. Raymond Shirt Pc
Raymond Pant Pc + Shirt Pc
COMBO GIFT BOX
RAYMOND 3Pc SUIT Length Rs.1000/-
AT NEW M.N. Next to K.F.C
DISPENSARY Rd. OFF COMMERCIAL
BANGALORE -1 Mob: 9343 03 7218

Is Adani's firm mining illegally, MLCs ask

MLCs slam govt for not recovering pending dues worth Rs 850cr for unauthorised mining

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

A heated exchange took place in the Karnataka Legislative Council on Tuesday over alleged non-payment of mining dues and the "unauthorised" continuation of quarry operations by the Adani Group's ACC Limited. The ruling Congress and Opposition BJP members questioning the government's handling of royalty recovery and permissions.

Raising the issue during Question Hour, Congress MLC K Shivakumar, speaking on behalf of his party MLC Arathi Krishna, alleged that substantial royalty dues remained unpaid even as operations continued.

Krishna wanted to know whether the State government was aware that the lease period granted to Adani Group's ACC Ltd for mining in the Kannur Limestone Block at Wadi in Kalaburagi has expired.

"If it is true, what action has the government taken against the said company for allegedly carrying out unauthorised mining at the site without paying the total dues of Rs 850.21 crore towards royalty, rent or penalty payable to the State government?" she asked in the written question.

Krishna questioned the apparent disparity in enforcement between small quarry operators and large corporate entities. She said letter has been written to the Centre regarding renewal of the lease in favour of the company.

BJP MLC CT Ravi echoed similar concerns, questioning the legal and procedural basis for allowing participation in bidding and continuation of operations despite pending dues.

"Do your rules allow those with pending dues to participate?" he asked.

Minister N Cheluvarayaswamy, replying on behalf of the Mines and Geology Minister SS Mallikarjun, maintained that no fresh licence had been granted and that the matter involved both an existing mining lease and a separate new application still under process.

He said the company had applied through the bidding route and was given time to complete formalities, which had since been done.

"The old licence is continuing under court direction. It has not been stopped. We are following court direction," he said, adding that part payment had been made and the balance would be decided through legal proceedings.

"The court has not said do not recover dues. Why have you not recovered?" Ravi challenged.

Shivakumar also raised concerns over declining non-tax revenue from mining, citing the State's own budget observations.

"If Rs 800 crore to Rs 900 crore is allowed to let go like this, where will non-tax revenue come from?" he asked.

"How can we recover when the amount itself is not decided? Until recovery is possible, no further permission will be given," Cheluvarayaswamy responded. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddarmaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar and others, with the MLCs whose term has completed, after the session at Vidhana Soudha, in Bengaluru, on Tuesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

CLEANER ENERGY

In a push for clean energy, the government inaugurated 290kw solar panels at Vidhana Soudha, in Bengaluru on Tuesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

2 SC GROUPS CLASH OVER WATER

GADAG, 24 MARCH

Tension gripped Chikkavaddatti village of Mundargi taluk in Gadag district after a dispute over a man allegedly drinking water without permission escalated into a violent clash between two communities on Monday night.

The incident began when a youth belonging to the Madiga community drank water at a farm owned by a Valmiki community farmer. The farmer objected, citing the youth's caste, which led to the issue triggering a confrontation between the two Scheduled Caste communities.

The situation quickly turned volatile, with both groups engaging in assault and stone-pelting. At least 15 people from both sides were injured. The injured have been admitted to a nearby hospital.

Additional police units have been deployed to maintain law and order. Authorities said the situation is now under control. —*Salar News*

Varsities should be apolitical: Govt on blocking RSS event

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar on Tuesday defended the government's decision to stop a proposed three-day lecture series on the RSS ideologue Deendayal Upadhyay at Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) in Mysuru, saying public universities must remain apolitical and free from ideological influence.

The International Academic Conference called 'Ekatma Manava Darshan' was scheduled to be held from March 25 to 27 at the Convocation Hall of the KSOU, a statement by the RSS media group stated.

Responding to criticism from the BJP over the cancellation of a lecture series, Sudhakar cited concerns over the nature of the organising body and the involvement of university authorities.

- Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar said the decision to block the event at the Mysuru university was linked to ideology

"It is shocking that our university has joined hands with them. The Vice-Chancellor himself is the reception committee chairman," he said.

Alleging that the organisers were linked to a particular ideological stream, the Minister said, "This organisation is an intellectual wing associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). When such an organisation is conducting the event and the Vice-Chancellor himself is part of it, I think it sends a wrong message."

Sudhakar termed the development a "breach of protocol", stating that the government had not been informed about the event.

"This is a State university. If at all it was related to improving higher education, then the government should also have been part of it," he added. —*PTI*

'Vegetables rotting due to bad water in KC, HN Valley'

Even vegetables in Kolar and Chikkaballapur are rotting days after harvest due to the poor quality water from KC Valley and HN Valley projects, said JD(S) MLC Inchara Govindaraju in the Assembly. The MLC said that he would fall at the feet of the concerned minister so that the water quality could be improved soon. He noted that the government is spending crores of rupees to the projects, but the water is not of suitable quality. The MLC said that the secondary treatement for the sewage was insufficient and demanded tertiary treatment. —*SALAR NEWS*

Govt wants to make Jakur aerodrome a club for MLAs: LoP

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Leader of Opposition R Ashok on Tuesday alleged that the Congress is planning to shut down Bengaluru's Jakkur Flying Training School to develop an exclusive club for MPs, legislators, and senior bureaucrats. Speaking in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, he said there was a "big lobby" to bring a developer from Rajasthan to redevelop the 200 acre space.

He further alleged that such a move could pave the way for real estate interests to construct high-rise buildings around the City's only Government Flying Training School (GFTS).

Ashoka quipped that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar had set his sight on the land. Shivakumar had recently met the Union Civil Aviation Minister about the curbs on the height of high-rises in the City.

During the discussion, Energy Minister KJ George said he had written to the Chief Minister suggesting that the GFTS land could instead be used to develop a major sports complex, similar to the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. —*Agencies*

Bike gets entangled in cable in Hubballi, 2 killed

HUBBALLI, 24 MARCH

Two youths were killed on the spot when their motorcycle got entangled in a cable whaich had fallen down in Hubballi on Monday night, police said.

The accident occurred near Urban Oasis Mall on Gokul Road, where a cable had reportedly snapped and fallen across the road. The victims, who were travelling on a bike got caught in the cable, lost control of the vehicle, and crashed. The dead, Fayaz, 25, and Mohid, 27, were residents of Taj Nagar. Both died on the spot. A case has been registered at the Hubballi North Traffic Police Station. —*Salar News*

Japan loans 1,02,480M Yen for Metro Phase 3

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on Tuesday said it has signed a loan agreement with the Centre to provide an Official Development Assi stance (ODA) loan of 1,02,480 million Yen for the Bengaluru Metro Rail Project Phase 3 (I).

The agreement was signed in New Delhi between Alok Tiwari, Joint Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, and Takeuchi Takuro.

The project will include civil and architectural works for approximately 44.65 km of Metro lines with 31 elevated stations, comprising the Outer Ring Road section (Corridor 3 1) and the western growth corridor (Corridor 3 2), the government agency said in a release.The project will connect with Airport Line and Line 6, completing a circular network around the City centre. "The loan will have a repayment period of 30 years, including a grace period of 10 years, with an interest rate of Tokyo Term Risk Free Rate (TORF) + 80 basis points for the project and 0.80 per cent for consulting services, and procurement will follow general untied conditions," it added. —*Salar News*

Chikkaballapur revives temple tanks to beat summer heat

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 24 MARCH

The Chikkaballapur district Zilla Panchayat is preparing to beat the summer heat by reviving 180 dry kalayani (temple tanks) in six taluks.

Zilla Panchayat CEO Naveen Y Bhat has drafted a novel programme to revive the kalayanis with the ZP administration in association with NGOs, NSS volunteers, organisations, and other "like-minded" people such as ASHA workers through the "Shrama dan".

The 90-day revival programme was launched on Monday and will continue till the kalyanis are revived by removing the garbage, weeds, unwanted stones, and silt.

The stone structures around the Kalyanis will be restored to facilitate the storage of rainwater, Bhat said.

The district has no perennial water source and people depend on rain water for drinking and agriculture. The water table, which shows the groundwater levels, has dropped to 1,800. —*Salar News*

TWIST IN ACCIDENT CASE

Woman & lover kill her husband, booked

YADGIRI, 24 MARCH

A case was registered at the Yadgiri rural police station on Monday against a woman and her two accomplices on charges of murdering a man and then trying to pass it off as death due to an accident.

The deceased has been identified as Sagar Babu Rathod, 28, an auto driver from Chamanalli Tanda in the taluk.

Police stated that a case has been registered against Sagar's wife Pooja for allegedly abetting the murder, and Reddy Balaram Rathod from the same locality and his friend Mahesh for committing the murder. An investigation is underway.

According to the complaint filed by the mother of deceased, Reddy had been in an illicit relationship with Pooja for the past three to four years. Despite warnings and counselling through a local panchayat, they did not mend their ways.

Reddy continued to maintain close relations with Pooja, which led to frequent quarrels between Sagar and Reddy.

Pooja and Reddy Balaram Rathod allegedly murdered her husband Sagar Babu Rathod and tried to pass it off as an accident ***PHOTO: SALAR***

On Sunday evening, Sagar left for Yadgiri along with Mahesh in his auto. At around 9:30 pm, when Pooja called him, he said he would return home late. When a relative called Mahesh over phone, he reportedly said Sagar might have been drunk and don't search for him.

On Monday morning, Sagar's body was found under suspicious circumstances by a roadside near the KEB Kalyana Mantapa on the Housalli (M) road with severe injuries on his head.

SP Prithvik Shankar and other officials rushed to the spot for investigation.

To cover up the murder, they overturned the auto to make it appear as if it was a road accident. The FIR also alleges that Pooja abetted the crime, the police said. — Salar News

Medico loses money in online game, ends life

BIDAR, 24 MARCH

A medical student allegedly died by suicide after reportedly losing money in an online game.

The deceased is Anishkar Chavhan, 21, a final-year MBBS student at BRIMS Medical College. He reportedly died by hanging himself from a ceiling fan in his hostel room.

The student's father, Shamrao Chavhan, told reporters, that his son used to share everything with the family but had never mentioned anything about online gaming. Police stated that was in a distress after losing money.

"We came to know about his death when my daughter called us. My son himself used to say that one should not play such online games," the grieving father said, urging authorities to conduct a proper investigation.

Bidar Superintendent of Police (SP) Pradeep Gunti stated that during the examination of the student's mobile phone, it was found that he had been playing online games. Preliminary investigation suggested that he had lost around Rs 80,000 in the game. WhatsApp chats related to the game were also found. Based on this, police suspect that he may have taken the extreme step due to distress caused by financial loss. —*Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Delhi HC rejects Lalu's plea in land-for-jobs scam

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed Lalu Prasad Yadav's plea to quash the FIR in the land-for-jobs case. Justice Ravinder Dudeja said, "The petition, being devoid of merit, is dismissed." The case relates to alleged land-for-jobs appointments in Indian Railways' West Central Zone during Yadav's tenure as railway minister from 2004 to 2009, involving land gifted or transferred by recruits to his family or associates. Yadav, 77, a former Bihar chief minister and railway minister, argued the FIR lacked prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act. The FIR was registered on May 18, 2022, against Yadav, his wife, two daughters, officials, and private persons. He is currently out on bail. —*PTI*

Nitish Kumar elected as JD(U) President

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has been elected unopposed as JD(U) President, with no other nominations filed, the party's general secretary Mohammad Nisar confirmed. The deadline for nominations was 11am on 24 March. Since only Kumar filed, the returning officer, former Rajya Sabha MP Aneel Prasad Hegde, will issue his certificate today at 2.30pm. Senior leaders including Sanjay Kumar Jha, Lalan Singh, and Shrawan Kumar will be present. Kumar's nomination was submitted on Thursday; Jha, one of the proposers, submitted his nomination at the party's central office. Kumar took over as JD(U) leader ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls after Singh's resignation in December 2023. —*PTI*

FIR against UP AIMIM Chief for provocative speech

MEERUT, 24 MARCH

Police in Meerut registered an FIR against AIMIM UP chief Shaukat Ali after a video surfaced showing him allegedly making provocative remarks. Kotwali Circle Officer Antariksh Jain said the case was registered at Lohiyanagar police station under relevant sections, and further legal action would follow. The video reportedly shows Ali making objectionable and inflammatory comments. Local Hindu leader Sachin Sirohi condemned Ali's speech, claiming it could disturb communal harmony. Police urged the public to refrain from sharing inflammatory content on social media and maintain peace. The authorities are monitoring the situation as investigations continue .—*PTI*

Kashmiri separatist Asiya gets lifer in UAPA case

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

A Delhi court on Tuesday sentenced separatist leader Asiya Andrabi to life imprisonment after convicting her in a UAPA case. Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh announced the verdict following arguments on sentencing. Andrabi, along with associates Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen, was convicted on 14 January under UAPA Sections 20, 38, and 39, and IPC Sections 153A, 153B, 120B, 505, and 121A. Andrabi and her associates received sentences of life imprisonment and 30 years respectively. The court had found them supporting terrorist activities and conspiring against India. The NIA had sought life imprisonment, asserting she had waged war against the nation. —*PTI*

Do ED officers not have rights?: SC to Didi

SC raps Mamata for disrupting IPAC raids, asks if ED can go to cops against CM

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Tuesday quizzed the West Bengal government over its objection to the maintainability of the Enforcement Directorate's plea on the alleged obstruction by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a raid, asking about the fundamental rights of ED officers.

The top court remarked that some officers of the ED have filed petitions in their individual capacity seeking to know whether they cease to be citizens of India merely because they are officers of the agency.

The West Bengal government has questioned the maintainability of the ED's plea, which alleged obstruction by Banerjee and other state authorities during its January 8 search of the office of political consultancy firm Indian Political Action Committees (I-PAC) in Kolkata. The search was in connection with a money-laundering probe.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and NV Anjaria was told by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Banerjee, that a person who moves the court under Article 32 of the Constitution has to specifically set out which fundamental right of his has been violated.

"Please concentrate on the fundamental rights of the officers of the ED with whom the offence has been committed. If you only concentrate on ED, ED, ED and forget the second petition which is preferred by the individual officers who were the victims of that offence, you may miss the point and you will be in difficulty," Mishra observed.

"Not only that, assuming he has a fundamental right, then the petition must state which fundamental right has been violated," he said adding that in this particular case the ED is not even a person.

At this juncture, Justice Mishra remarked, "If the CM barges into an ED investigation and commits an offence, your idea of remedy for the ED is to go to the state government which is headed by the CM and inform them about it and seek remedy?"

Responding to the question, Sibal said, "Your lordships are assuming that the chief minister has committed an offence." —*PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at St Lucy Church at Chalsa, in Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal, on Tuesday —*PTI*

Cat is out of the bag: Didi to EC

KOLKATA/BARASAT, 24 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday alleged that the purported BJP rubber stamp on a communication of the Election Commission proved beyond doubt which party was controlling the poll watchdog from backseat.

A political row erupted on Monday after a March 2019 letter from the EC was found carrying the seal of the BJP's Kerala unit.

"It is now clear from this BJP rubber stamp on EC notification who is running the commission from behind. The cat is out of the bag," Banerjee told. "This is not a clerical mistake, it was done with a deliberate political intention," Banerjee claimed, refuting the EC's reported response that it was a human error. She claimed that EC communication was not meant only for Kerala but was for chief electoral officers of India.

Meanwhile, a large number of crude bombs were found in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on Tuesday, police said. —*PTI*

RG Kar survivor's mom's ticket bid won't deter me from justice: CPI(M) leader

CPI(M) young turk Dipsita Dhar is disheartened at the RG Kar Hospital rape-murder victim's mother wanting to fight the West Bengal Assembly elections on a BJP ticket, but says her emotional connection to the polls continues to centre around the cause of justice for the tortured medical intern. The 32-year-old Left candidate from the Dum Dum Uttar seat in the northern fringes of Kolkata asserted that her poll plank spills over to the fight for the state's women at large, who continue to suffer gender-based violence. —*PTI*

Prez declines TMC's request for meet over paucity of time

The Rashtrapati Bhavan has again declined the Trinamool Congress's request for a meeting with President **Droupadi Murmu**, citing "paucity of time". The party initially wrote on 9 March to brief her on West Bengal's welfare initiatives, but the request was refused on 11 March. Despite subsequent pleas and reminders, the request was denied on 22 March. The party then appealed again between 24 March and 2 April, following tensions during Murmu's recent Bengal visit, where she criticised the state's handling of a tribal conclave & protocol issues. —*PTI*

3 ASSAM CONG CANDIDATES REJECTED

GUWAHATI, 24 MARCH

The nomination of three Congress candidates, including in the Jalukbari seat where Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** is contesting in Assam Assembly, has been rejected during scrutiny on Tuesday, EC said.

Altogether 18 nomination papers have been rejected till 4.30pm.

The nominations of Congress candidates Ananda Narah from the Dhakuakhana seat, Nirmal Langthasa from Haflong and Bidisha Neog from Jalukbari have been rejected.

GAURAV GOGOI ASSETS

The assets of Assam PCC President Gaurav Gogoi and his wife Elizabeth Clare Gogoi have increased to Rs 7.57 crore in 2026 from Rs 4.66 crore in 2024. Gogoi's movable assets rose to Rs 72.59 lakh from Rs 38.30 lakh, while immovable assets increased to Rs 2.49 crore from Rs 2.25 crore during last polls.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced that the resignation of Assam MP Pradyut Bordoloi, has been accepted. —*PTI*

DELHI CM ANNOUNCES FREE LPGs

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister **Rekha Gupta**, who slammed the previous government over its 'freebie culture' has announced 2 free LPG cylinders for each household in the Rs 1.03 lakh crore Budget for FY27 presented on Tuesday, according to sources.

Gupta allocated Rs 260 crore for the free LPG scheme, it said.

She also announced several welfare schemes, including free diagnostic tests for newborn babies, free bicycles to 1.3 lakh girl students and laptops for meritorious students, and a new semiconductor policy, besides 'emergency operation centre' for disaster management.

Presenting the budget for the second time in the Delhi Assembly, Gupta called it a "Green Budget", pointing out that 21 per cent of the total allocations for initiatives for environmental protection.

The government has earmarked Rs 19,326 crore for the education sector.

AAP MLAs boycotted the budget presentation. —*PTI*

PM has forgotten Covid horror: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Covid-19 reference in his statement in Parliament on the West Asia situation, saying that he has forgotten what had happened during the pandemic.

Gandhi alleged that India's foreign policy has become "Modi's personal foreign policy" which is being considered an "universal joke."

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Gandhi said, "If the PM is compromised, our foreign policy is compromised."

ON reports of Pakistan being one of the intermediaries between the US-Israel and Iran, and India's stand on the West Asia crisis, he said, "Our foreign policy is Modi's personal policy. Everybody considers this a universal joke."

On Monday, Modi said the problems caused by the West Asia conflict are likely to persist for a long time and called upon the nation to be prepared, as it had during the Covid pandemic.

Additionally, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge termed Modi's statement in Rajya Sabha on the West Asia crisis as "an exercise in obfuscation" and said it has come "too late" and raises more questions than answers.

Kharge also slammed Modi for his Covid-19 reference in his statement in the Upper House, asking "is the prime minister now suggesting that 140 crore Indians must once again fend for themselves as the country stares at an escalating energy crisis". —*PTI*

Congress MPs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, S Jothimani and Imran Masood and the LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, in New Delhi —*PTI*

LS to get 273 more seats for women quota

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The government's plan to implement the women's reservation law by increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 from the present 543 may require carving out the new constituencies from the present seats, sources said on Tuesday.

To implement the women's quota law even before the delimitation exercise, the government plans to bring two bills to reserve 273 seats for women.

By amending the Delimitation Act, the central government plans to create 273 new seats for women.

One plausible way is to carve out the new seats from the present 543, an official explained.

The official noted that while there are norms to reserve seats for scheduled castes and scheduled tribe, there is no yardstick at present to reserve seats for women.

One way could be to go for a "draw of lots" to decide on the 273 seats proposed for women.

To reserve similar 33 per cent seats for women in state legislative assemblies, a "pro rata" formula will be applied.

Once approved by Parliament, the proposed laws will come into force on 31 March, 2029. —*PTI*

Poll manifesto: AIADMK vows free fridges to ration cardholders

CHENNAI, 24 MARCH

AIADMK General Secretary **Edappadi K Palaniswami** on Tuesday promised free refrigerators for all rice category of ration cardholders if his party is voted to power.

Also, he assured to provide one kilo of dal and one litre of cooking oil free to rice ration cardholders in Tamil Nadu, and a one-time grant of Rs 10,000 to every family to manage tax burden and price rise.

There are nearly 2.22 crore rice ration cardholders in the state who receive free rice, and commodities like sugar, toor dal, and palmolein oil at subsidised prices every month through the PDS networked 34,773 fair price shops.

Rice category ration card is used as an eligibility norm by the state government for its welfare schemes.

Palaniswami's announcements toe the line of late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, who had promised free fans, blenders and grinders in the 2011 AIADMK election manifesto.

Releasing the party's poll manifesto for the April 23 election, at the AIADMK state headquarters here, Palaniswami said, "The free fridge is meant to reduce the workload of homemakers."

The party has already promised three free LPG cylinders per year to eligible households, and Rs 10 lakh ex-gratia for families in case Jallikattu bull tamers die during the sport. — *PTI*

Kamal Haasan-led MNM opts out of TN polls, backs DMK

CHENNAI, 24 MARCH

The MNM, a constituent of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance, on Tuesday announced that it would not contest the 23 April Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu.

MNM founder & Chief Kamal Haasan declared that his party will not fight polls but will extend unconditional support to all the candidates of the DMK-led alliance.

DMK-VCK DEAL

The ruling DMK on Tuesday signed a seat-sharing pact with its ally VCK, allotting it eight seats, including two general constituencies.

The agreement was signed by Chief Minister **MK Stalin**, who is the DMK President and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi Chief Thol Thirumavalavan, at Anna Arivalayam, the DMK state headquarters here.

The VCK, which earlier sought 10 seats, finally settled for eight during the second round of negotiations. As per the agreement, the VCK will contest six reserved constituencies and two general seats, as part of the alliance.

DMDK SEATS

The DMK on Tuesday allotted 10 seats to its ally, DMDK. DMK President MK Stalin and DMDK General Secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth signed a pact at the DMK headquarters 'Anna Arivalayam' affirming 10 seats for the DMDK. — *PTI*

NON-DISCLOSURE OF ₹200 CR LAND

Oppn fumes as EC clears Rajeev's nomination

T'PURAM, 24 MARCH

The Congress and CPI(M) in Kerala alleged that BJP state chief Rajeev Chandrasekhar had concealed details about his high-value property in Bengaluru in the affidavit he submitted with his nomination papers for the 9 April Assembly elections.

Both the ruling CPI(M) and opposition Congress announced a legal battle against Chandrasekhar over the matter, as the Returning Officer for the Nemam constituency accepted the BJP leader's nomination despite the allegations and complaints.

Chandrasekhar, however, asserted that the allegations were baseless and challenged his political opponents to approach the court.

The BJP has fielded Chandrasekar in the high-profile Nemom constituency against CPI(M) leader and general education minister V Sivankutty and former Congress MLA KS Sabarinathan.

After the scrutiny, Chandrasekhar's nomination was accepted notwithstanding the complaint filed against him, official sources said.

Reacting to the move, Sabarinathan said that the Returning Officer is a quasi-judicial authority and lacks the jurisdiction to decide on such issues.

He added that the matter would now be taken forward through appropriate legal avenues.

Sharing similar views, KPCC General Secretary and Congress Nemom constituency core committee chairman Manakkad Suresh alleged that valuable immovable property was deliberately concealed in the candidate's affidavit.

Soon after the acceptance of Chandrasekhar's nomination, Sivankutty also announced that he would initiate legal proceedings against BJP candidate in this regard. —*PTI*

'Remarks on Sudhakaran was to expose his betrayal of Marxism'

IDUKKI, 24 MARCH

Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** on Tuesday justified his remark against former CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran, claiming the word "chettatharam" was not intended as an insult, but rather as a reference to his former colleague's "betrayal" of Marxist ideology.

Vijayan said that he did not refer to Sudhakaran as a 'chetta' (bad man).

"I said political 'chettatharam' (cheapness). It does not mean I am calling someone 'chetta'," the CM contended.

Vijayan claimed that Sudhakaran's actions amounted to a betrayal of his party's ideology, and that is what he meant to convey through his remarks.

His remark had led to a war of words between the CPI(M) and Sudhakaran, with the latter alleging that Vijayan does not know the meaning of many Malayalam words. —*PTI*

— PTI

Around 150 fall ill after wedding feast in Assam

DIPHU, 24 MARCH

Around 150 people fell ill in a suspected case of food poisoning after attending a wedding in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, an official said on Tuesday. Two critically ill persons have been admitted to the Diphu Medical College and Hospital here, while the others are undergoing treatment at a government facility, he said. Most of the guests who attended the wedding in Pator Timung village in Bokoliaghat area on Monday started complaining of stomach ache, dysentery and vomiting towards evening. "The actual cause of the illness is yet to be ascertained, although food poisoning is suspected, an official said.—*PTI*

Owner held after UP cold storage collapse deaths

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 MARCH

The owner of the Prayagraj cold storage which collapsed, killing four workers and injuring 14 others, was detained on Tuesday, police said. Ansar Ahmad, the owner of the cold storage in Phaphamau, has been taken into custody for questioning. DCP (Ganga Nagar) Kuldeep Gunawat said an FIR was registered late on Monday night against seven persons and four to five unidentified individuals in connection with the incident. The administration has ordered a probe into the incident. District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma has assigned the inquiry to Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue) Vinita Singh. The collapse led to leakage of ammonia causing panic in the area, officials added.—*PTI*

Three held for suspected terror links in Andhra

VIJAYAWADA, 24 MARCH

Three men have been arrested here for allegedly expressing support for extremist ideology on social media and suspected links to terror networks. Disclosing this a police official said on Tuesday that the three accused had been identified as Mohammad Rahmatulla Sharif, 23, Mirza Sohail Baig, 23, and Mohammad Danish, 27. The three were arrested after they were detected during surveillance of online activities linked to radical content and propaganda, the police said. "Based on Intelligence inputs, our teams arrested three individuals. They were found promoting extremist content on social media platforms," the official said.—*PTI*

— BOLLYWOOD

Delhi HC protects Sonakshi Sinha's personality rights

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has protected the personality rights of actor Sonakshi Sinha by restraining platforms, including AI chatbots, from unauthorised use of her image, voice or persona. Justice Jyoti Singh ordered infringing parties to remove weblinks within 36 hours. The court said no third party can use her attributes without consent. It noted unlawful exploitation for commercial gains and said obscene AI-generated content caused irreparable harm. "Defendants... are restrained from using... name, image, voice... without her authorisation," it ordered. It also barred sale of merchandise using her persona, stating such misuse harms goodwill and reputation significantly.—*PTI*

Gujarat becomes 2nd state to table UCC Bill

Bill contains common law for marriage, succession, live-ins

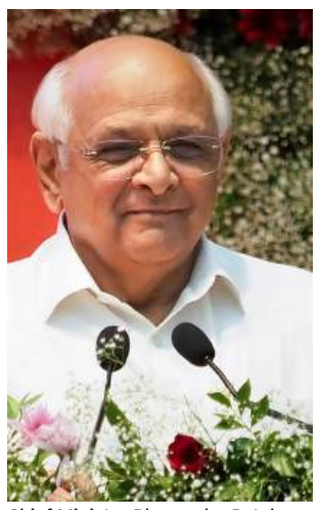
GANDHINAGAR, 24 MARCH

The Gujarat government tabled the Gujarat Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, 2026 in the Assembly on Tuesday, proposing a common legal framework to govern marriage, divorce, succession and live-in relationships irrespective of religion.

The Bill was tabled by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel a week after a state-appointed panel submitted its final report on implementation of the UCC.

If the bill is cleared, Gujarat will become the second state in the country after Uttarakhand to pass a UCC bill. Uttarakhand passed a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in February 2024. Titled the 'Gujarat Uniform Civil Code, 2026', the proposed law will extend to the entire state and also apply to residents of Gujarat living outside its territorial limits.

But it will not apply to members of Scheduled Tribes and certain groups whose customary rights are protected under the Constitution. The Bill aims to create a uniform legal framework, as per its "Objects and Reasons" statement. Among other things, it provides for registration of live-in relationships, as well as their termination through a formal declaration. The bill also prohibits bigamy. A marriage will be considered legally valid under the Code only if neither party has a living spouse at the time when the marriage is solemnised.



Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel tabled the UCC Bill —*PTI*

CH'GARH PASSES ANTI-CONVERSION BILL

The Chhattisgarh Assembly passed a bill on 19 March aimed at preventing religious conversions through force, inducement, fraud or misrepresentation. The Bill has provisions like life imprisonment in cases of "mass conversion."

The Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantraya Vidheyak 2026 (Freedom of Religion Bill 2026), tabled in the House by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, was passed amid a boycott by Congress legislators. Citing alleged cases of forced religious conversion incidents in Narayanpur and Kanker districts in the Bastar region of the state, he said the government does not intend to restrict voluntary conversions. — *PTI*

SC grants pension relief to women SSC officers

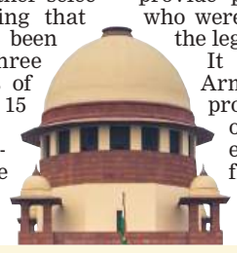
NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday that women Short Service Commission (SSC) officers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force denied permanent commission due to "systemic disparity" would be entitled to full pension. The court delivered three verdicts challenging the denial of PC (permanent commission) based on policy changes in 2019 and Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) rulings.

In the verdict on a plea by Yogendra Kumar Singh related to the Navy, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi granted PC to several groups of SSC officers, primarily women, as a one-time measure.

The bench set aside the need for yet another selection board, noting that the officers had been subjected to three gruelling rounds of litigation over 15 years.

The dispute pertained to how the Navy assessed its officers and the appellants, around 25 officers, said that their annual confidential reports (ACRs) were "casually graded" during the years they were technically ineligible for PC. "When officers are assessed under the assumption that they have no future in the service, the appraisal process is inevitably affected," the verdict said.As a one-time measure, the bench directed grant of PC to in-service Short Service Commission Women Officers (SSCWOs) inducted before January 2009 and SSCWOs who joined after January 2009 in branches excluding law, education, and naval architecture. In its second judgment on a plea by Lt Col Pooja Pal, the bench gave PC to women officers and directed the government to provide pension to those who were released during the legal battle.



It ruled that the Army's evaluation process for women officers was rooted in a "systemic framework" of discrimination. — PTI

SC bins PIL on census of denotified tribes

The SC on Tuesday refused to entertain a PIL seeking directions to include Denotified Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) as a distinct category in the national census. Observing that such classifications fall within the domain of government policy and is "not justiciable," Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi disposed of the petition and permitted petitioner Dakxinkumar Bajrange to make a representation before the census commissioner of India. The PIL sought an order to the census commissioner to ensure that members of denotified nomadic tribes are specifically identified. Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for the petitioner, said the plea was not seeking ST, but only statistical visibility. —*PTI*

2 LPG ships from UAE, 1 tanker from Saudi on way to India

People wait in long queues at a gas station amid rumours of a fuel shortage due to the West Asia conflict in Nagpur on Tuesday —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Two LPG carriers from the UAE and one crude oil carrier from Saudi Arabia are heading towards India. Meanwhile, Navy Chief Dinesh Tripathi has cancelled his trip to Australia and New Zealand due to the Iran-US war and the shipping crisis in the Persian Gulf.

The Indian-flagged MV Jag Vasant and MV Pine Gas, sailing five nautical miles apart, left UAE ports at 6 am IST on Monday for India after Iran gave clearance for the two LPG vessels to cross the strait.

The vessels carrying 92,612.59 MT of LPG transited the Strait of Hormuz on Monday, the shipping ministry said.

The vessels have 33 and 27 Indian seafarers on board, respectively. The Jag Vasant is likely to reach Kandla port on 26 March and Pine Gas is scheduled to reach New Mangalore on 27 March, according to the shipping ministry. In the Gulf of Oman, the LPG ships will be escorted by Indian Navy warships for 24 hours.

Crude oil carrier MT Kallista is loading at the Saudi Arabian port of Yanbu and will depart Tuesday for Paradip via Jeddah. The Panama-flagged ship will also be provided escort by Indian Navy ships through the Gulf of Aden.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Council (IRGC) is not allowing Indian warships to escort Indian vessels.

The Iranian embassy in India on Monday denied reports that Tehran is seeking USD 2 million for each vessel that passes through the Hormuz Straits. — *PTI*

10 ultras held near Myanmar border

IMPHAL, 24 MARCH

Security forces arrested 10 cadres of the banned Prepak (RA) near the India-Myanmar border in Manipur's Tengnoupal district, a police statement said Tuesday. Five of those held are minors, it said. The juveniles are being treated under procedures of the Juvenile Justice Act.

Around 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in clashes between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. Meanwhile, a mob tried to enter Kuki Zo Council chairman H Thanglet's residence, prompting security forces to fire tear gas to disperse them. — *PTI*

RS 55 CR PAYMENT IN FOREX

Formula E scam: KTR prime accused

HYDERABAD, 24 MARCH

The Telangana ACB has filed a chargesheet in a court here in the Formula E race case in which BRS Working President KT Rama Rao is the prime accused.

The charge sheet, filed on Monday, also names senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar, former Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority chief engineer BLN Reddy, and two others.

The probe pertains to alleged irregularities in the payments of around Rs 55 crore, mostly in foreign currency, for the Formula E race planned in 2024 during BRS rule.

KT Rama Rao —*PTI*

The payment allegedly violated laid-down procedures.

The race was held in Hyderabad in February 2023, while the second edition, scheduled for 2024, was cancelled after the Congress government assumed office in December 2023.

In December 2024, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) registered a case against Rama Rao, Kumar, and Reddy under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Indian Penal Code, for criminal misappropriation, breach of trust, and conspiracy.

The then governor Jishnu Dev Varma had granted sanction for the prosecution of Rama Rao in November 2025, while the Centre cleared the prosecution of Arvind Kumar last month. — *PTI*

Varsities must not curb peaceful protests: HC

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Delhi High Court has revoked the suspension of a student of Dr BR Ambedkar University over alleged participation in a protest, observing that free speech and peaceful expression of ideas cannot be restricted merely because they do not align with the management's ideology.

Justice Jasmeet Singh emphasised that a university must create an atmosphere where students are free to participate in discussions on academic or public issues and that peaceful protests are a natural part of such an environment. Justice Singh said a university that accepts only obedience fails in its broader educational role as it is not just a place where students complete courses but also where they are expected to learn and inculcate independent t thought processes, the ability to ask questions, and engage in critical thinking.

Justice Singh emphasised that a university must allow students to participate in discussions on academic or public issues —*PTI*

"When students express disagreement in a peaceful and orderly manner, such conduct cannot be treated as something outside the scope of holistic development. On the contrary, it reflects the very spirit of freedom to engage in discourse and discussions that a university is expected to encourage," the court stated.

The respondent alleged that the petitioner student was taking part in a sit-down protest, which violated a court order.

The court, however, said that even if the petitioner was taking part in the peaceful sit-down protest against the withdrawal of arbitrary show cause notices, revocation of suspensions, and restoration of timing, expulsion was a highly disproportionate disciplinary action. — *PTI*

J&J ISSUES LEGAL NOTICE TO HYD DOCTOR OVER ERZL, ORSL POSTS

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Johnson & Johnson's consumer health arm under the Kenvue group has sent a legal notice to Hyderabad paediatrician Dr Sivaranjani Santosh over her social media posts questioning its electrolyte drink products, ORSL and its rebranded version ERZL.

The notice dated 16 March 2026, and issued through law firm Lall & Sethi, asks the doctor to remove her posts and reels within seven days and refrain from commenting on the company's products. Dr Santosh has been raising concerns about ORSL for nearly eight years, arguing that it was being sold alongside Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) despite not meeting the WHO recommended formulation.

ORS is a therapeutic formulation used to treat dehydration due to diarrhoea and contains specific concentrations of glucose and electrolytes. According to Dr Santosh, ORSL had higher sugar levels and lower electrolyte content, while its name closely resembled "ORS," potentially confusing caregivers. — *PTI*

Naxal leader Papa Rao to surrender: Ch'garh DyCM

KAWARDHA, 24 MARCH

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said the last remaining senior Maoist commander, Papa Rao, will surrender along with his team on Tuesday.

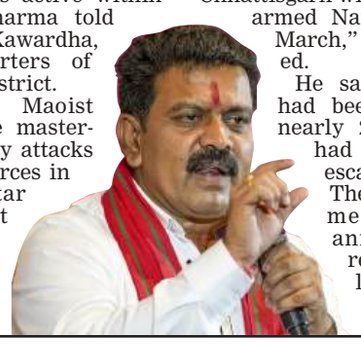
Once Papa lays down arms, it can be stated "technically and clearly" that no Naxal operative of that rank or even lower remains active within the state, Sharma told reporters in Kawardha, the headquarters of Kabirdham district.

The senior Maoist had been the mastermind of deadly attacks on security forces in south Bastar during the last two decades. He had also masterminded the Tadmetla attack (in the then Dantewada district, now in Sukma) in 2010, in which 76 troopers were killed.

Papa, who is active in the Dandakaranaya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) of Maoists, will surrender along with his team in the Bastar region, said Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio.

"With this surrender, Chhattisgarh will be free from armed Naxalism by 31 March," Sharma stated.

He said Papa Rao had been active for nearly 25 years and had managed to escape each time. The state government had announced a reward of Rs 25 lakh for him. — *PTI*



INDIA'S FIRST PASSIVE EUTHANASIA

Harish Rana dies after 13 years in coma

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Harish Rana, the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia, died on Tuesday at AIIMS-Delhi after around 13 years in coma, sources said.

The 31-year-old, who has been in coma since 2013, was shifted from his Ghaziabad home to the palliative care unit at the Dr BR Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on 14 March.

Three days before that, the SC, in a judgment on 11 March, allowed passive euthanasia for Harish, who was a BTech student at the Panjab University when he fell from a fourth-floor balcony in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries.

Passive euthanasia is letting a patient die by withdrawing life support or the treatment necessary to keep him alive.

Harish Rana was shifted from his home to the palliative care unit at the Dr BR Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital at the AIIMS —*PTI*

Harish's nutritional support was gradually withdrawn after admision in the hospital, the sources said.

Harish's family had said after the SC judgment that the withdrawal of artificial life support would not bring any personal benefit to the family, but in the larger public interest, the decision could help others facing similar situations.

His father, Ashok Rana, had said passive euthanasia would restore Harish's dignity after years of suffering.

Pinki Virani, a journalist who filed a petition for euthanasia for Aruna Shanbaug in 2011, thanked the AIIMS doctors. In its 11 March judgement, the SC had directed AIIMS-Delhi to ensure that life support is withdrawn as per a tailored plan.

A team headed by Dr Seema Mishra, professor and head of the department of anaesthesia and palliative medicine, was constituted to implement the process. The team comprised doctors from the departments of neurosurgery, onco-anaesthesia and palliative medicine, and psychiatry. — PTI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday addressed a gathering on Eid-ul-Fitr at Red Road in Kolkata —*PTI*

Muslim outfits test TMC's minority fortress in WB

West Bengal's minority vote bank is showing signs of churn ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, with smaller Muslim outfits, a resurgent Congress in north Bengal and simmering grievances testing the ruling TMC's once-impregnable electoral fortress.

For nearly 15 years, minority voters have formed the backbone of the TMC's electoral dominance in the state. Multiple players are now vying for a slice of the roughly 30 per cent minority electorate, which influences outcomes in more than 114 of the state's 294 assembly seats.

Political observers said the emergence of players such as the Indian Secular Front (ISF) led by Nawsad Siddique, suspended TMC MLA Humayun Kabir's AJUP aligning with AIMIM, and renewed Congress activity in Murshidabad and Malda has injected a new layer of uncertainty into Bengal's minority electoral arithmetic.

They said such a development could become one of the defining undercurrents of the 2026 polls.

"Earlier, minority voters consolidated behind the TMC almost instinctively, largely because of the BJP factor. But the emergence of new platforms and local grievances has created micro-level fissures that could hurt the ruling party in a tightly contested election," political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said.

The tremors are most visible in the other Muslim-dominated districts of Uttar Dinajpur and parts of South Bengal, where smaller outfits have begun mobilising support around questions of political representation, identity assertion and local development.

The ISF, which shot into prominence in the 2021 assembly polls after winning the Bhangar seat, has been attempting to consolidate younger Muslim voters disillusioned with mainstream parties. Siddique, its lone MLA, has repeatedly accused both the TMC and the BJP of exploiting minorities electorally.

"Minorities are treated like milch cows that are used only during elections," he said, alleging that the three-term TMC government has failed to deliver real development.

Adding another layer to the churn is Humayun Kabir, the outspoken Murshidabad legislator who was suspended from the TMC after repeated attacks on the party leadership.

Kabir has floated the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP) and is now aligning with AIMIM, positioning the combine as an alternative political platform for Muslim voters.

He believes the emotive issue of constructing a new Babri Masjid in Murshidabad, along with a growing sense of political assertion among Muslims, could influence the 2026 assembly polls.

He has even suggested that the next state government could, for the first time since Independence, see either a Muslim chief minister or a Muslim deputy chief minister.

"For establishing the Babri Masjid, if 100 Muslims go to vote, 80 of them will vote for candidates of the AJUP," he told PTI, asserting that his party would contest 182 seats and could emerge as a "kingmaker" in a fractured mandate. The former TMC leader also argued that Muslims, who make up nearly 30 per cent of Bengal's voters, remain underrepresented politically.

"In our party, more than 100 candidates will be Muslims. That shows who is serious about giving Muslims political representation," he said.

Congress is attempting to revive its traditional base in Malda and Murshidabad, districts where it once dominated Bengal's minority politics before the TMC's rise.

Senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said the party's improved performance in the region in recent years shows that sections of minority voters are reconsidering their political choices.

"In Murshidabad and Malda, our alliance with the Left increased the opposition vote share in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. We even defeated the TMC in the Sagardighi bypoll in 2023," he said.

The former MP, who might contest the assembly polls, said the party wants to maintain a "70:30 binary" between the TMC and BJP even as opposition forces attempt to build a broader secular consolidation.

BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari repeatedly claimed that the minority vote would "split this time", alleging that sections of Muslims have "lost confidence in the TMC government". The shifting political currents coincide with the SIR of the electoral rolls, which has drawn attention because many scrutinised voters are concentrated in minority-heavy districts.

District-level data shows Murshidabad has over 11 lakh voters under adjudication, followed by Malda with 8.28 lakh, North 24 Parganas with 5.91 lakh and South 24 Parganas with 5.22 lakh.

Together, these districts account for nearly 100 assembly seats and have historically formed the backbone of the TMC's electoral success.

Another Kolkata-based political analyst said, "One argument is that deletions may hurt the TMC because many of these areas are its strongholds. But there is another possibility - when voters feel their citizenship is being questioned, they may consolidate even more strongly behind the party they see as their protector," he said.

Controversies surrounding the amended Waqf law, disputes over OBC reservations, and concerns about madrasa recruitment and minority educational institutions have surfaced repeatedly in political discussions ahead of the polls.

Mohammed Kamruzzaman, general secretary of the All-Bengal Minority Youth Federation, told PTI, "In seats where the BJP is relatively weak, some voters could shift towards smaller Muslim parties, the Congress or the Left. That could split the anti-BJP vote and dent the TMC's traditional minority vote bank in certain pockets."

The ruling party, however, remains confident that minority voters will ultimately rally behind it in the face of what it describes as attempts to divide secular votes.

"The minorities know that only the TMC has consistently protected their interests. Parties such as ISF or AJUP are indirectly helping the BJP. Just like the past 15 years, minorities will stand by the TMC," state Minister Firhad Hakim said. —*PTI*

SALAR سالار

Kerala sees a tight race in Peravoor's tough terrain

CPI(M) is making a strong push in Peravoor with one of Kerala's most recognisable Left leaders, KK Shailaja, as its candidate. However, observers see her contest sitting MLA and KPCC President Sunny Joseph in the Congress stronghold as a move by rivals within the CPI(M) to sideline her further —*x*

Peravoor Assembly constituency in the politically sensitive Kannur district is known as a relatively calm pocket, where most people depend on farming for their livelihood.

But the hilly region, which has seen incidents of human-animal conflict, remains a difficult terrain for the CPI(M), the district's dominant political force.

By fielding one of Kerala's most recognisable Left leaders, former health minister KK Shailaja, the party is making a strong push to connect with voters in this hillside constituency.

Some political observers, however, see her candidature against sitting MLA and KPCC President Sunny Joseph in the Congress stronghold as a move by rivals within the CPI(M) to sideline her further.

Shailaja, who won the party fortress of Mattannur seat twice -- by a record margin in the 2021 Assembly elections -- dismisses such claims.

She says the party has fielded her in Peravoor to win back the seat from the UDF. The constituency has been represented by Joseph for three consecutive terms.

Widely seen as one of the most effective ministers in the first Pinarayi Vijayan-led government, Shailaja remains a grassroots-connected leader within the party in Kerala.

"The CPI(M) does not choose candidates only for easy victories," she told PTI Videos.

"It also fields them to reclaim constituencies the party has lost," the CPI(M) Central Committee member said.

Her work and dedication as the state health minister, especially during the first Nipah outbreak and later the Covid pandemic, earned her global attention. However, she was not part of the second Pinarayi Vijayan-led cabinet and remained an MLA from Mattannur.

"I have won from this constituency in 2006, and that too with a good margin. So it is not an impossible task," Shailaja said, sitting at the CPI(M) area committee office in Kottiyoor.

Peravoor has a sizeable Christian population, largely migrant farmers from the Travancore region who have settled in this hillside constituency over several decades.

"I am a native of Peravoor, and it is where I began my political career. I am sure this time people will rally behind me to give the Pinarayi government a third term," Shailaja said, adding that the poor performance of Joseph as MLA would work in her favour.

"It is a tight fight," she admitted.

Joseph remains hopeful of securing a fourth consecutive victory.

"It is going to be an election against the failed governance of the Vijayan-led government, and the people of Peravoor will support me in this fight," the Congress leader said.

As the KPCC president, overseeing the election campaign of the Congress party, he has not been able to spend much time in the constituency, as he travels frequently.

"I am there in the constituency all the time as their MLA, and people understand that I am also the KPCC president," Joseph said.

He is not worried about the stature of his opponent, having defeated Shailaja in the 2011 elections.

What may concern him, however, is the sharp drop in his victory margin in 2021, when he edged past Sakeer Hussain of the CPI(M) by just over 3,000 votes. In 2016, his margin had been more than 7,000 votes.

Shailaja had lost the 2011 election to Sunny Joseph by a narrow margin of around 2,700 votes and hopes to overturn that in 2026.

The BJP-led NDA has fielded Paily Vathiattu, the state general secretary of BDJS, a political party founded by Thushar Vellapally, son of SNDP Yogam general secretary Vellapally Natesan.

Vathiattu, who was earlier with the Congress, has served as a local self-government representative in Peravoor and is confident of defeating both his rivals.

"I know every nook and corner of the constituency, having worked here all my life -- during my employment and later in my political career. I know every issue the constituency faces," Vathiattu told PTI.

He says he is not intimidated by the stature of his opponents.

"With the BJP supporting me and the blessings of Narendra Modi behind me, I am confident I can bring development to every panchayat in Peravoor, and the people will trust me," he said.

Human-animal conflict is the most pressing issue in this hillside constituency.

As most residents are farmers, they frequently face wild animals destroying their crops. In areas such as Aralam Farm, several lives have been lost due to elephant attacks.

Vathiattu said neither the present government nor the MLA had done enough to help these farmers.

As Peravoor heads to the polls on April 9, a key question remains: can Shailaja break into the stronghold of the Congress, or will Joseph retain the seat for a fourth term? —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Transgender Bill in LS: Govt hails reform, Opposition calls it draconian

The government on Tuesday said the objective of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 is to provide protection to such persons as the opposition slammed the proposed legislation for taking away the right to self-determination of identity and demanded that it be sent to a standing committee for proper consultations.

Moving the bill for consideration and passage in Lok Sabha, Social Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar said its objective is to provide safety and benefits to the community.

"To ensure that transgender persons can avail themselves of the benefits of this Act, it was necessary to provide a precise definition for them; this bill has been introduced to address that very need," the minister said.

He said the bill includes a provision for the establishment of a medical board.

District magistrates will issue identity cards to transgender persons, he said.

Participating in the debate, Congress MP Jyothimani said the bill has been brought without consultations from transgender people and shows the government's "callous" attitude.

She said Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi have listened to transgender people and deeply understand what they feel.

Jyothimani asserted that this bill is not a reform.

A Supreme Court judgement has recognised that gender identity is a matter of self determination.

"It is affirmed that dignity, bodily autonomy, identity are protected under Article 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution," she said.

The Congress MP criticised the provision of bringing a medical board for identity determination and claimed that the bill narrows the definition of transgender.

"This is not democracy but a monologue of power which is the trademark of the Modi government," Jyothimani alleged.

The bill must be referred to a standing committee for comprehensive consultations with the transgender people, she asserted.

Opposing the legislation, Samajwadi Party's Anand Bhadauria said the government claims that the bill is for the welfare of transgender people, but if that is true, then why are they opposing this bill on the streets.

He pointed out that it was the SP that established the 'Samajwadi kinnar sabha' within its organisational ambit.

"The BJP wants to make people stand in queue. Now you want to make transgender people stand in line for their identity," he said, adding that the bill gives limited definition of transgender people.

"It is unfair exclusion and is not based on constitutional principles," he said.

People from the LGBTQ+ community take part in a rally against Transgender (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in Kolkata on Sunday —*PTI*

DMK's T Sumathy also slammed the government for allegedly interfering with the right to self-determination of identity.

"This government treats the transgender community as subjects to be corrected which is highly condemnable... the DMK rejects the bill. The government should withdraw the bill and at the least send it to the standing committee of Parliament," she said, calling the bill "draconian".

The bill seeks to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and exclude "different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities" from the proposed law's ambit was introduced in Lok Sabha earlier this month.

The bill provides for graded punishments that reflect the gravity of the harm inflicted upon such persons.

It underlines that a transgender person "shall not include, nor shall ever have been so included, persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities".

"The intent, object and purpose of the Act is and was to protect a specified class of persons socially and culturally known as transgender people who face societal discrimination of an extreme and oppressive nature.

"The purpose was and is not to protect each and every class of persons with various gender identities, self- perceived sex/gender identities or gender fluidities," the bill says.

The bill notes that it is imperative to give a precise definition for proper and definitive identification and protection of transgender persons, to whom the benefits of the present law must reach.

The protection and benefits that are provided under the present 2019 law are vast in nature, and therefore, care has to be taken that "such identification cannot be extended based on any acquirable characteristics or personal choice or claimed self-perceived identity of an individual".

The bill also contains provisions for "designation of an authority" which will have the option to seek "expert advice" if required.

A new clause defines "authority" as a medical board headed by a chief medical officer or a deputy chief medical officer appointed by the central government, state government or a Union territory administration.

The bill notes that over the course of time, during the implementation of transgender protection law, "certain doubts and difficulties have arisen and are likely to arise" regarding the "expanse of the definition" of transpersons.

It inserts a new sub-clause to define a transperson as one having socio-cultural identities as 'kinner', 'hijra', 'aravani' and 'jogta', or eunuch, or a person with intersex variations or a person who, at birth, has a congenital variation in one or more sex characteristics as compared to male or female.

The bill proposes to create specific offences with graded punishments that reflect the gravity of the harm, the irreversibility of the injury, and the particular vulnerability of child victims. —*PTI*

— WIKIPEDIA

Kim flays US, vows to cement nuclear status

SEOUL, 24 MARCH

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has pledged to irreversibly cement his country's status as a nuclear power while maintaining a hard-line stance toward South Korea, which he called the "most hostile" state, state media said Tuesday. In a speech Monday to Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, Kim accused the US of global "state terrorism and aggression," and said the North will play a more forceful role against Washington. He said whether adversaries "choose confrontation or peaceful coexistence is up to them." Kim praised nuclear expansion, saying, "The dignity of the nation...can only be guaranteed by the strongest of power." He vowed to "consolidate our absolutely irreversible status as a nuclear power." —*PTI*

Russia, Vietnam ink deal to open nuclear plant

HANOI, 24 MARCH

Vietnam and Russia signed an agreement to build a nuclear power plant at Ninh Thuan, aiming to boost energy security and reduce greenhouse gases. The deal was signed during Prime Minister Pham Minh Chính's visit to Moscow, where he met Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. It is a "symbolic project" of their friendship and aligns with Vietnam's goal to become an Asian "tiger economy" by 2050. The plan involves constructing two Russian-designed reactors with a combined capacity of 2,400 megawatts, based on an existing Russian plant. The deal follows concerns over global energy shortages. Discussions also covered expanding cooperation in oil, gas, technology, and infrastructure. —*PTI*

Court orders Cosby to pay $60M for 1972 sexual assault

LOS ANGELES, 24 MARCH

A Californian civil jury found Bill Cosby liable for drugging and sexually assaulting ex-waitress Donna Motsinger in 1972, awarding her $59.25 million. After a two-week trial, jurors awarded $17.5 million in past damages and $1.75 million for future suffering, including "mental suffering, loss of enjoyment of life, inconvenience, grief, anxiety, humiliation, and emotional distress." In a second phase, they awarded an extra $40 million in punitive damages. Cosby's lawyer Jennifer Bonjean expressed disappointment. Motsinger stated, "I hope this gives strength to other survivors." Her lawsuit alleges Cosby drugged her at a restaurant near San Francisco, leading to her assault, with Cosby denying the allegations. —*PTI*

US to pay French company $1B to exit wind project

PROVIDENCE, 24 MARCH

The Trump administration will pay USD 1 billion to a French company to exit US offshore wind leases, intensifying its push against renewable energy. TotalEnergies agreed to abandon projects off North Carolina and New York and instead invest in fossil fuels. The Interior Department called it an "innovative agreement," while critics labelled it a "billion-dollar bribe." CEO Patrick Pouyanné said funds would support liquefied natural gas and oil projects. The administration argues fossil fuels lower costs and improve reliability. Environmental groups and officials, including New York's Governor, criticised the move. Despite federal opposition, some offshore wind projects continue after court rulings allowed construction, with one Virginia project already supplying power to the grid. —*PTI*

Rescue workers after missile strikes damaged buildings in Tehran; (inset) a blaze after strikes in Tel Aviv, on Tuesday —*IRAN RED CRESCENT/X@SENTDEFENDER*

Strikes echo across West Asia with no sign of easing

Iran, Israel trade blows as dozens more killed

DUBAI, 24 MARCH

Airstrikes battered Iran and Iranian as missiles, and drones targeted Tel Aviv and sites across the West Asia on Tuesday, even as President Donald Trump said the US was in talks with the Tehran.

With thousands more US Marines on their way to the Gulf raising speculation that the US may try to seize Kharg Island, the war's tempo remained high a day after Trump delayed his self-imposed deadline to strike Iran's energy infrastructure if it doesn't reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has threatened to mine the Gulf if the US appears to be on the verge of landing troops.

Trump also said that US Defence Secretary **Pete Hegseth was the first to suggest striking Iran,** as his narrative continued to evolve.

BLASTS IN TEHRAN

Israel said it carried out an extensive series of strikes on Iranian "production sites," without providing more information. In Tehran, a massive blast was heard in northern neighbourhoods and another in the city centre.

IRAN POUNDS TEL AVIV

In Tel Aviv, a missile with a 100kg warhead slammed into a street in the city centre, injuring at least four people.

BLASTS ACROSS GULF

In Kuwait, power lines were hit by air defence shrapnel, causing partial electricity outages for several hours. One person was killed in Bahrain, as the Kingdom said it was attacked with missiles and drones. The UAE said air defence systems responded to attacks, and Saudi Arabia said it destroyed Iranian drones targeting its oil-rich Eastern Province. Meanwhile, at least 30 people were reportedly killed in Iraq by US and Iran separately.

ISRAEL HAMMERS LEBANON

Israel pounded Lebanon saying it was targeting Hezbollah. A strike on a residential apartment southeast of Beirut killed at least three people, including a 3-year-old girl. Another five people were killed in the south. —*Agencies*

Zolghadr replaces Larijani as Iran security chief

DUBAI, 24 MARCH

Iran named former Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr as the new Secretary of the country's Supreme National Security Council on Tuesday, replacing Ali Larijani, who was killed in an Israeli-US airstrike.

Zolghadr reached the rank of brigadier general in the Guard. He had been serving as the secretary of Iran's Expediency Council.

Before the 1979 revolution, reports said that Zolghadr was associated with the Mansourun guerrilla group, an Islamist militant organisation active at the time. He was allegedly involved in the killing of an American engineer and an oil company manager in 1978.

Zolghadr will now head one of the most powerful institutions in Iran, responsible for shaping the country's defence, nuclear, and foreign policy strategies.

Notbaly, Larijani was seen as a moderate and a potential bridge to negotiations. —*Agencies*

Situation is fluid: White House on Pak mediating

WASHINGTON, 24 MARCH

Pakistan is reportedly attempting to broker negotiations between the White House and Iran. The White House confirmed that Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir spoke to US President Donald Trump on Sunday, but did not comment on poassible meetings, saying the the situation was "fluid".

Sources had said that US and Iranian officials could meet in Islamabad sometime this week.

After Munir spoke to Trump, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, spoke to the Iranian president, Masoud Pezeshkian, on Monday. According to an official readout of the call, they "agreed on the urgent need for de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy".

Pakistan has been seeking to woo the Trump administration to get better deals, even nominating the President for the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt on Monday said nothing concrete could be said as of now over the reports claiming that US Vice President JD Vance, US Envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner would meet with Iranian officials in Islamabad.

She said that: "This is a fluid situation, and speculation about meetings should not be deemed as final until they are formally announced by the White House." —*Agencies*

An Israeli airstrike hit the Qasmiyeh Bridge over the Litani River that connects south Lebanon with the rest of the country —*PTI*

Asia boosts coal use amid LNG woes

BANGKOK, 24 MARCH

Asian countries are turning to coal as much of the continent's imported fuel passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

LNG is a natural gas cooled to liquid form for easy storage and transport. It has been promoted as a bridge fuel in the shift from oil and coal to cleaner energy sources. LNG burns cleaner than coal, but still emits climate change-causing gases, especially methane.

But now countries are shifting back to coal to meet their energy needs, even as it is more damaging for the environment.

China, the top coal consumer and producer, has built record coal power generating capacity since 2021 to improve its energy security.

India, the second-largest coal consumer and producer, is bracing for a scorching summer and will rely more on coal to meet record demand of 270 gigawatts. It has enough coal for about three months, with some stockpiles earmarked for small businesses.

Indonesia, the largest exporter of coal has begun to use the stockpiles for domestic consumption, meaning the price of coal will likely rise.

Higher prices will also hurt Southeast Asia, the world's third largest coal-consuming region, including the Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand. —*PTI*

COAL CRISIS DEEPENS AMID WAR

The de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz has stopped LNG supply. Nearly 90% of Asia's LNG flowed through Hormuz.

13% rise in coal price in Asia since war began.

75% of India's power is coal produced.

270 gigawatts: India is facing a record power demand as it braces for a scorching summer.

3 months Indian stockpile of coal.

FOOD SUPPLY HIT

Food crisis looms as the 38km-wide Hormuz, carrying a third of global fertiliser, was closed around sowing season for a lot of the world. Here is a look at the impact:

- 47% jump in urea prices since the war began.
- Russia, the world's largest exporter of ammonia has halted all exports until 21 April to help domestic farmers
- Beijing has banned exports of nitrogen-potassium blends and phosphate fertilisers til August. China is the world's largest phosphate producer.
- 15% increase in food prices if the conflict persists, according to UN.
- 20 to 40% estimated lower crop yields for corn, wheat, and rice.
- There are no strategic reserves for fertilisers.

Emergency in Philippines over low energy supply

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Tuesday declared a state of national energy emergency over "an imminent danger of a critically low energy supply." Under the declaration, which will initially last for a year, he will lead a committee that monitors the distribution of fuel, food, medicines, agricultural products and other basic goods.

Drones disrupt AWS' Bahrain cloud hub

Amazon on Monday said its Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud computing region in Bahrain has been disrupted due to drone activity, the third such incident in a month. The company did not specify the damage. AWS powers numerous major websites, enterprises and government services globally and is the company's primary profit driver.

Massive explosion at Texas oil refinery

A massive explosion took place at the Valero Refinery on Monday in Port Arthur, Texas. Sheriff Zena Stephens said that the explosion was likely caused by an "industrial heater". The company, the largest global independent refiner, shut its 3,80,000-barrel-per-day refinery after the fire. There were no reported injuries.

Israel FM wants to annex parts of Lebanon

TEL AVIV, 24 MARCH

Israel should move its border with Lebanon up to the Litani River, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Monday. The Litani River lies some 30km north of the current Israeli-Lebanon border.

Israel has repeatedly bombed bridges over the river, including the Qasmiyeh Bridge, a key crossing linking Lebanon's south to the rest of the country, in what Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called a "prelude to a ground invasion".

"The current war in Lebanon must end with a radical change, beyond the vanquishing of the terror group Hezbollah," Smotrich told a meeting of his Religious Zionism faction at the Knesset. "The Litani must be our new border with the state of Lebanon, just like the 'Yellow Line' in Gaza and like the buffer zone and peak of the Hermon."

The Yellow Line is the de facto buffer zone in Gaza after the October 2025 ceasefire. Israel has been accused of reshaping it. Mount Hermon in Syria was annexed by Israel in 2024.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Israel Katz said that "the IDF will control the remaining bridges and the security zone up to the Litani".

"The principle is clear: Where there is terror and missiles, there will be no homes and no residents, and the IDF will be inside," he added. —*Agencies*

"Hundreds of thousands of residents of southern Lebanon who evacuated northward will not return south of the Litani River until security for the residents of the north is ensured... (Netanyahu has) ordered the acceleration of the demolition of Lebanese houses in the border villages... in accordance with the Beit Hanoun and Rafah models in Gaza

—Israel Katz, Israeli Defence Minister

"Lebanon's fight today is just. It's a fight against those who threaten its security. No one justifies the act of terrorists (but) Lebanon alone must manage its problems and nothing can justify violating sovereignty

—Emmanuel Macron, French President

Markwayne becomes new Homeland Security Secy

WASHINGTON, 24 MARCH

The Senate on late Monday confirmed US President Donald Trump's nominee Markwayne Mullin to take over as homeland security secretary in place of Kristi Noem.

Noem was fired amid public backlash over the US administration's immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations.

Mullin, a Republican senator from Oklahoma known for his close friendship with Trump, has tried to present himself as a steady hand, saying his goal as secretary would be to get the department off the front page of the news.

He takes over at a difficult time as Trump has ordered ICE agents to bolster airport security during a budget standoff in Congress. The Republican chairman of the Homeland Security Committee questioned Mullin's character and temperament during last week's combative confirmation hearing. Senators confirmed him on a largely party-line vote, 54-45.

A former mixed martial arts fighter and collegiate wrestler, Mullin comes to the position with the management experience of running a family plumbing business in Oklahoma. He comes into office at a time when public support for the president's immigration agenda has fallen after a year of high-profile operations in multiple American cities. —*PTI*

CHARGES NOT REVEALED

Bangladesh ex-military general arrested

DHAKA, 24 MARCH

Retired lieutenant general **Masud Uddin Chowdhury**, a key figure in Bangladesh's 2007 interim government, has been detained in Dhaka. Police confirmed he was arrested last night at his Baridhara residence by plainclothes officers in relation to five cases lodged against him. The charges have not yet been specified.

Chowdhury played a significant role in replacing the caretaker government with the army-backed interim administration that governed until 2008 elections. He later served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Australia and was a member of parliament representing the Jatiya Party, an ally of the now-disbanded Awami League. The military-led interim government pursued a "minus two formula" targeting leaders of the BNP and Awami League.

Chowdhury was previously the coordinator of the National Coordination Committee on Serious Crimes during the 2007-2008 period. His arrest followed the exile of former army chief General Moyeen U Ahmed and other influential officers. Chowdhury's property was also ordered to be confiscated last July. —*PTI*

Russian strikes kill 4 in Ukraine as it preps for new ground ops

KYIV, 24 MARCH

Russian drone and missile strikes killed at least four people in Ukraine, officials said. Moscow fired nearly 400 long-range drones and 23 cruise missiles overnight, Ukraine's air force said, one of the largest attacks in weeks after a relative lull.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said the barrage caused damage in 11 regions.

Meanwhile, Moscow's army stepped up efforts to break through Ukrainian front-line defenses in what could be the start of an anticipated spring ground offensive.

Russia escalated its strikes from 17 March and has moved heavy equipment and more troops to the front line, think tanks said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold rebounds to Rs 1.44L/10g; Silver stays flat

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Gold prices snapped a four-day losing streak and climbed Rs 1,200 to Rs 1.44 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday, while silver remained flat at Rs 2.30 lakh per kg, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,43,600 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Monday. Traders attributed the rebound in domestic gold prices to a recovery in global commodity markets and some buying at lower levels after recent declines. Spot gold rebounded after nine sessions of losses, rising $16.96, or 0.38 per cent, to $4,423.83 per ounce, while silver was trading 1.03 per cent higher at $69.86 per ounce. *—PTI*

Oil firms fear big damage from war: Chevron CEO

HOUSTON, 24 March

Executives with the global oil companies and energy ministers have voiced their concern over the likely adverse, long term impact of the disruptions in supply of crude oil through Strait of Hormuz as a result of the ongoing US-Israel war with Iran. The views were expressed at the annual CERAWeek conference in Houston on Monday. The US Energy Secretary Chris Wright sought to downplay the crisis. He said oil prices had not increased to the extent that it would hurt demand. He called for increasing the output to stabilize the oil market. Chevron CEO Mike Wirth said the present scale of disruption 'is greater than during the Russia-Ukraine war'. JP Morgan analysts held that supply disruptions have since "quickly translated into outright shortages of crude and refined products across Asia." *—AGENCIES*

Manipal Health files for ₹8,000 cr IPO

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Temasek-backed hospital chain Manipal Health Enterprises has submitted preliminary papers with Sebi to launch an IPO, aiming to raise Rs 8,000 crore through a fresh issue of shares. The IPO includes a Rs 5,378 crore issue for loan repayment, Rs 574 crore for acquiring a minority stake in Sahyadri Hospitals, and general corporate use. Additionally, there will be an offer-for-sale of 43,227,668 shares by promoters and investors. The company may consider a pre-IPO placement of up to Rs 1,600 crore. Operating 38 hospitals with 10,761 beds across 14 states, Manipal served 3.94 million patients in six months and 7.19 million in FY2025, with FY25 revenue at Rs 8,242.2 crore. Lead managers include Kotak Mahindra, Axis Capital, Goldman Sachs, Jefferies, JP Morgan, UBS, and DBS. *—PTI*

'Govt to reduce PDS broken rice to boost ethanol'

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Centre plans to propose reducing the allocation of broken rice in the public distribution system (PDS) from 25 to 10 per cent, freeing roughly 90 lakh tonnes annually for ethanol production, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra announced. Speaking at the All-India Distillers' Association conference, Chopra said the move aims to provide a stable, year-round feedstock to the ethanol industry, reducing reliance on Food Corporation of India (FCI) stocks. The surplus broken rice, from approximately 360-370 lakh tonnes distributed annually, will be sold via auction to ethanol producers and animal feed manufacturers. Starting 2027, the government will cease providing whole-grain FCI rice to distilleries. *—PTI*

Investors get rich by ₹7.56L cr as mkt jumps 2%

Sensex up by 1,372.06 pts, while Nifty climbs 399.75 pts

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Investors' wealth surged by Rs 7.56 lakh crore to Rs 4,22,78,312.77 crore (USD 4.50 trillion).

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded by nearly 2 per cent on Tuesday, tracking a relief rally in Asian peers after US President Donald Trump announced a temporary halt on strikes targeting Iranian energy infrastructure.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,372.06 points or 1.89 per cent to settle at 74,068.45. During the day, it soared 1,793 points or 2.46 per cent to 74,489.39.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 399.75 points or 1.78 per cent to end at 22,912.40.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, InterGlobe Aviation, Eternal, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and UltraTech Cement were the biggest winners.

Power Grid and State Bank of India were the only laggards from the pack.

Trump said on social media that he has extended the deadline for Iran to reopen the

Strait of Hormuz, the strategically located shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and that he will hold off strikes against Iranian energy sites for five days.

The BSE MidCap Select index jumped 2.77 per cent and SmallCap Select index climbed 2.29 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended higher. Services surged 3.46 per cent, followed by BSE MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (2.99 per cent), industrials (2.98 per cent), Private Banks index (2.63 per cent), consumer durables (2.46 per cent), Bankex (2.40 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.39 per cent), financial services (2.34 per cent), auto (2.30 per cent) and commodities (2.19 per cent).

HOW MARKETS PERFORMED

DOW US	46,110.20	(0.85%)↓
S&P 500 US	6,573.98	(0.42%)↓
Nasdaq US	21,731.45	(0.98%)↓
Nikkei Japan	52,252.28	(1.43%)↑
Hang Seng CHINA	25,063.72	(2.79%)↑
DAX GERMANY	22,471.53	(0.80%)↓
FTSE 100 UK	9,902.54	(0.08%)↑
CAC 40 PARIS	7,712.25	(0.18%)↓
KOSPI SOUTH KOREA	5,553.92	(2.74%)↑

A total of 2,968 stocks advanced, while 1,295 declined and 168 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 10,414.23 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 12,033.97 crore. *—PTI*

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Crude oil prices rebounded in futures trade on Tuesday, rising by Rs 204 to Rs 8,549 per barrel amid uncertainty over geopolitical developments in West Asia.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for April delivery increased by Rs 204, or 2.44 per cent, to Rs 8,549 per barrel.

In the previous session, crude plunged by Rs 1,186, or nearly 13 per cent, to hit an intraday low of Rs 8,072 per barrel before settling at Rs 8,345, down by Rs 913, or 9.86 per cent on the MCX.

Analysts said crude oil prices remained volatile as markets weighed conflicting developments around Iran and the Strait of Hormuz.

Globally, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for the May contract gained USD 2.68, or 3.04 per cent, to USD 90.81 per barrel, while Brent Oil for June delivery rose USD 2.80, or 2.92 per cent, to USD 98.72 per barrel in New York.

- Globally, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for the May contract gained USD 2.68, or 3.04 per cent, to USD 90.81 per barrel, while Brent Oil for June delivery rose USD 2.80, or 2.92 per cent, to USD 98.72 per barrel in New York.

WTI crude experienced sharp volatility on Monday plunging over 10 per cent to around USD 84.3 per barrel after Trump indicated that the US and Iran had engaged in talks and announced a halt to strikes on Iranian power and energy infrastructure.

However, prices saw a modest recovery. *—PTI*

Aluminium industry seeks relief amid gas shortage

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Aluminium Extrusion Manufacturers Association of India (ALEMA) has urged the government for urgent relief measures as the industry is grappling with severe LPG and PNG shortages triggered by the escalating West Asia crisis.

The ALEMA has urged the government to implement urgent relief measures, including interest rate cuts and loan moratoriums.

ALEMA, in a recent letter to the government, said the conflict in West Asia has severely disrupted supplies of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and piped natural gas (PNG), critical fuels for melting, heating and ageing processes in aluminium extrusion manufacturing.

"Many extrusion units have been compelled to shut down or reduce production by 30-70 per cent due to acute shortages and supply prioritisation by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas," the association said.

ALMA represents nearly 250 of India's 450 aluminium extrusion companies — with 90 per cent being MSMEs.

ETHANOL AS COOKING FUEL

The petroleum industry on Tuesday urged industry players to develop ethanol as a clean cooking fuel for Indian households as part of efforts to reduce dependence on imported LPG and expand biofuel use.

RS Ravi, Director (Downstream) at the Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry (FIPI), appealed while addressing the All-India Distillers' Association conference, highlighting ongoing research into ethanol-based cooking stoves.

He sought active support from the IDA and its members on two key fronts: connecting with manufacturers to scale up production of these stoves, and more importantly, developing a viable supply chain to deliver ethanol directly to households. *—PTI*

IndiGo flags airfare impact as war pushes fuel costs higher

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

India's largest airline IndiGo on Tuesday said international flights in the summer schedule will vary depending on West Asia situation and flagged that demand will be impacted if there is any further rise in costs that will push airfares higher.

The escalating conflict involving US, Israel and Iran have pushed jet fuel prices higher and airlines' operations have also been disrupted due to the airspace curbs in West Asia.

For Indian carriers, jet fuel expenses account for around 40 per cent of the overall operating costs.

In a statement to PTI, an IndiGo spokesperson on Tuesday said it intends to start its domestic summer schedule with nearly 2,000 daily flights in April.

"IndiGo's international schedule was planned at similar levels to winter, but the deployed scale will, of course, vary based on ongoing circumstances in West Asia. It should be noted that there is a very material escalation in operating costs, with fuel and forex related costs expected to continue to increase very substantially, in addition to what is already an escalating cost environment," the spokesperson said.

IndiGo has started levying fuel charges ranging from Rs 425 to Rs 2,300 on domestic and international flight tickets from 14 March.

Air India, Air India Express and Akasa Air are also levying fuel surcharges. *—PTI*

HDFC BANK APPOINTS LAW FIRMS TO REVIEW EX-CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

HDFC Bank has appointed external law firms to independently examine the issues highlighted in the resignation letter by **Atanu Chakraborty** as part of a proactive step to ensure an objective and fact-based assessment.

The bank's spokesperson said the appointment of external law firms is a proactive measure taken by the bank to independently look at the aspects mentioned in the letter so as to ensure an objective and fact-based assessment. It is to be noted that Chakraborty abruptly quit as chairman of India's second biggest lender HDFC Bank, citing ethical concerns, effective 18 March. This is the first time that a chairman of the bank left mid-way.

"Certain happenings and practices within the bank, that I have observed over the last two years, are not in congruence with my personal Values and Ethics. This is the basis of my aforementioned decision," he said the letter. *—PTI*

Maruti plans to expand Gujarat plant for Rs 10,189 crore

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Maruti Suzuki India on Tuesday said it will invest Rs 10,189 crore to set up 2.5 lakh production capacity in the first phase at its new manufacturing plant in Gujarat.

It said its board has approved the addition of the first phase of capacity of 2.5 lakh vehicles per annum at Khoraj Industrial Estate manufacturing plant in Gujarat. The first phase of capacity at the plant is expected to be added by 2029, subject to market conditions, the company said in a regulatory filing. *—PTI*

Meesho launches AI voice shopping assistant 'Vaani'

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

E-commerce platform Meesho has announced the launch of 'Vaani', a generative AI-powered voice shopping assistant, targeting an estimated 500 million potential users who do not currently shop online.

Named "Vaani - Your Meesho Dost", the assistant is designed for users uncomfortable with typing, filters, and structured searches, enabling them to use natural language to find products, ask follow-up questions, and complete transactions, mimicking an offline shopping experience.

During its initial rollout in February 2026, Vaani interacted with over 1.5 million users, resulting in a 22 per cent increase in conversion rate, along with reduced returns and cancellations. The platform currently offers Vaani in English and Hindi, with plans to expand into regional languages across India. It's in-house technology utilises fine-tuned Large Language Models based on customer data. Addressing concerns about AI accuracy, Sanjeev Kumar, Co-Founder and CTO, stated the company has implemented robust guardrails and evaluation metrics. *—PTI*

Rupee drops to all-time low of 93.88 against USD

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

The rupee dropped 35 paise to 93.88 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday as a strengthening greenback against major crosses and elevated global crude prices spooked investors.

Foreign fund outflows amid uncertainties over the West Asia crisis further weighed on the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.66 against the greenback and remained volatile throughout the session. It eventually settled at 93.88 (provisional), down 35 paise from its previous close.

The rupee breached the 94-level against the US dollar for the first time on Monday, before closing flat at 93.53.

Trump on Monday said the US was talking with a "respected" Iranian leader and claimed the Islamic Republic was eager for a deal to end the war. However, Iran's denial of Trump's claims and continued hostilities in the region created uncertainty, pushing up global crude oil prices.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent higher at 99.18. *—PTI*

CONCERN OVER SIDE-EFFECTS

Govt tightens watch on GLP-1 as weight-loss drugs flood mkts

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

To ensure ethical pharmaceutical practices in the supply chain of weight-loss drugs of the GLP-1 class, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has intensified its regulatory surveillance against the unauthorised sale and promotion of the medications.

To this end, inspections and audits have been carried out at many online pharmacy warehouses, drug wholesalers and retailers to check for unauthorised sale and improper prescription.

With the recent introduction of multiple generic variants of GLP-1-based weight-loss drugs in the Indian market, concerns have emerged regarding

their on-demand availability through retail pharmacies, online platforms, wholesalers, and wellness clinics, health ministry officials said on Tuesday. These drugs, when used without proper medical supervision, may lead to serious adverse effects and related health risks.

Taking cognisance of the situation, the DCGI, in collaboration with state regulators, has initiated a series of targeted actions to curb possible malpractices across the pharmaceutical supply chain and stop unauthorised sales and use.

On 10 March, a comprehensive advisory was issued to all manufacturers, explicitly prohibiting surrogate advertisements and any form of indirect promotion that could mislead consumers or encourage off-label usage.

Audits and inspections were conducted at 49 entities, including online pharmacy warehouses, drug wholesalers, retailers, wellness and slimming clinics, the health ministry said.

Further, notices have also been sent to defaulting entities. *—PTI*

NHRC steps in as insurers exclude disabled children

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sent a notice to the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India over allegations of families of children with hearing and speech disabilities facing difficulty in obtaining life insurance policies.

A copy of the proceedings has also been sent to secretary in the finance ministry's department of financial services, it says.

A bench of the NHRC, presided by its member Priyank Kanoongo, has taken cognisance under Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, in this case.

The complainant, president of Laghu Udyog Bharati, Ludhiana, Punjab, has alleged that families of children with hearing and speech disabilities "face difficulty in obtaining life insurance policies because insurance companies often deny coverage or impose restrictive conditions due to the child's disability", reads the proceedings dated 16 March.

This situation allegedly creates "financial insecurity" and prevents specially-abled children from accessing equal financial protection, it says.

The allegations made in the complaint prima facie seem to be violations of the human rights of the victim, the rights panel has said. *—PTI*

The 2028 Los Angeles Olympics has announced its official look, and it's a blast of bold colours. The concept announced on Monday is based on a California superbloom, a phenomenon that occurs every 10-15 years in the spring and results in a vibrant explosion of wildflowers across hills, valleys and deserts. The orange Bird of Paradise, the city's official flower, inspired the primary colours used in the concept as well as the 13 blooms that make up the full Superbloom. Graphics were built on a precise grid, with visual density reduced closest to fields of play to keep athlete focus unimpeded. —*PTI*

Team India lands in Maldives for SAFF U-20 Championship

MALDIVES, 24 MARCH

The Indian Under-20 men's football team has arrived in the Maldives for the SAFF Championship, set to open against Pakistan on Thursday at the National Stadium. The Blue Colts will then face Bangladesh on 28 March in Group B, which also includes Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals on 1 April, with the final scheduled for 3 April. Head coach Mahesh Gawali emphasised the importance of the tournament, saying, "All teams are very competitive. We have to perform well." The squad, comprising 23 players, has started training to adapt to the humid coastal weather. Gawali added, "It's not only us playing in such conditions. We have to be ready." —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Mandhana retains 2nd spot in T20I rankings

DUBAI, 24 MARCH

India's Smriti Mandhana retained her second spot in the ICC women's T20I batters' rankings, while captain Harmanpreet Kaur rose to 14th. Shafali Verma held sixth position, Jemimah Rodrigues remained joint 11th. Deepti Sharma climbed to third among bowlers, with Renuka Singh Thakur staying sixth. Deepti also moved to third in all-rounder rankings. Australia's Georgia Voll entered the top 10 of batting rankings for the first time, while Sophie Devine moved up to 18th after two half-centuries. The update also featured Rwanda's Fanny Utagushimaninde, who became the youngest woman to score a century on T20I debut. Several other players made notable ranking gains across batting and bowling categories. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Klopp denies he has any contact with Real Madrid

ISMANING, 24 MARCH

Former Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp dismissed claims he could coach Real Madrid next season, calling the reports "nonsense." He stated, "They haven't even called once, not one single time. And my agent is over there, you can ask him too, they haven't called him either." Klopp, who left Liverpool in 2024, now oversees Red Bull clubs as head of global soccer. Speaking as a TV pundit, he added, "It's all just nonsense." While not ruling out a return to coaching someday, Klopp said, "I'm obviously not thinking about that at the moment." Last month, Red Bull expressed satisfaction with his work, amid speculation about his future. —*PTI*

Security beefed up at Chinnaswamy ahead of IPL

Stadium gets 500 CCTVs cameras and QR-based access

Only digital ticket holders will be allowed near or inside the stadium; A man hangs Royal Challengers Bengaluru posters ahead of the match —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

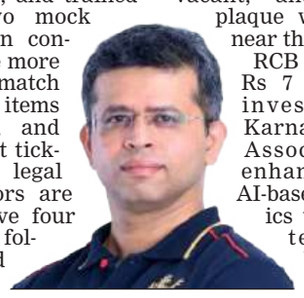
BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Bengaluru City Police on Tuesday announced elaborate security arrangements for upcoming Indian Premier League matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru will face Sunrisers Hyderabad in the season opener on 28 March, while a second fixture against Chennai Super Kings is scheduled for 5 April.

Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said access will be strictly controlled. Only digital ticket holders will be permitted near or inside the stadium. A multi-layer security setup includes QR-based entry, frisking, AI-powered CCTV surveillance with over 500 cameras, and live monitoring via central and stadium control rooms.

Medical readiness includes nine ambulances, four triage centres, multiple emergency access routes, clearly marked evacuation pathways, public address systems, and trained volunteers. Two mock drills have been conducted, with one more planned before match day. Restricted items are prohibited, and loitering without tickets will invite legal action. Spectators are advised to arrive four hours early and follow police and stadium instructions.



RCB will pay tribute to the 11 fans who died in the June 2025 stampede during the team's maiden IPL triumph. Players will wear jersey No.11 during practice and black armbands on match days. Eleven seats will remain permanently vacant, and a memorial plaque will be installed near the inner entrance.

RCB CEO Rajesh said Rs 7 crore has been invested with Karnataka Cricket Association for enhanced safety. AI-based crowd analytics via "Jarvis" system has beeen put in place. —*PTI*

Rinku Singh named KKR vice-captain

Three-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders on Tuesday appointed explosive batter Rinku Singh as their vice-captain for IPL 2026, underlining the franchise's long-term leadership plans. Rinku will assist skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who has been retained as captain despite KKR's disappointing IPL 2025 campaign. Rinku's rise has been one of the most remarkable stories in IPL history, from being picked for Rs 80 lakh in 2018 to being retained for Rs 13 crore ahead of IPL 2025. He shot to fame after smashing five consecutive sixes in a last-over chase, a feat that fast-tracked his India call-up.

Rape-accused Yash Dayal to miss out on IPL 2026: RCB

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Royal Challengers Bengaluru pacer Yash Dayal will not join the squad for the upcoming IPL season, though he remains under contract, Director of Cricket Mo Bobat confirmed on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old, who has not played since RCB's IPL 2025 title win, is facing two cases of alleged rape, including one involving a minor. Bobat said the decision was taken in the best interests of both the player and the franchise, adding that RCB has continued to support Dayal and maintain regular communication.

"We wanted to retain him and he remains under contract," Bobat said, while declining further comment on the matter.

RCB believe they have adequate depth to cover his absence, with domestic options including Rasikh Salam, Abhinandan Singh and Mangesh Yadav, all of whom impressed in preparatory camps.

Bobat admitted Dayal's absence is a setback, noting his key role in recent seasons, but expressed confidence in the squad's strength. He also said Josh Hazlewood is expected to join the team soon after completing his recovery. —*PTI*

Dubey, Payne to replace Akash Deep and Edwards

KOLKATA, 24 MARCH

Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad have named replacements for injured players ahead of the IPL starting 28 March. India pacer Akash Deep has been ruled out with a lumbar stress injury and will remain under the care of the Board of Control for Cricket in India at its Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

Left-arm seamer Saurabh Dubey, a 28-year-old Vidarbha bowler yet to debut in the IPL, replaces him at KKR for Rs 30 lakh. SRH have signed England pacer David Payne for Rs 1.5 crore as a replacement for Jack Edwards, who is sidelined with a foot injury. Edwards had earlier been bought for Rs 3 crore after a bidding contest with Chennai Super Kings. —*PTI*

Kal Somani buys RR for Rs 15K cr

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Rajasthan Royals are set to be sold to a US-based consortium led by Kal Somani for USD 1.63 billion (approx Rs 15,290 crore), marking a sharp rise in valuation for one of the Indian Premier League's original and least expensive franchises.

The consortium includes Rob Walton and the Hamp family of Ford Motor Company. Somani, an Arizona-based entrepreneur, has founded IntraEdge, Truyo.

Ai and Academian.

Other bidders included the Times Internet consortium, Aditya Birla Group and the Mittal family led by Aditya Mittal. The deal is subject to approval from the Board of Control for Cricket in India and will take effect after the 2026 season.

British-Indian businessman Manoj Badale, who acquired the franchise for USD 67 million in 2008 via Emerging Media, currently holds a 65 per cent stake.

Somani is also a co-owner of Detroit-based Motor City Golf Club, set to join Tomorrow's Golf League (TGL), co-founded by Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy. Walton previously led the USD 4.65 billion acquisition of the Denver Broncos and holds a stake in the Arizona Diamondbacks. —*PTI*

Asian CL matches postponed due to war rescheduled for April

KUALA LUMPUR, 24 MARCH

Four Asian Champions League Elite series that were postponed due to the war in the Middle East will be moved to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and played on a single-leg basis next month, the Asian Football Confederation said on Tuesday.

The last-16 matches had originally been scheduled to be played in Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on a home-and-away basis in the first two weeks of March. Those matches will now be held on 13 and 14 April as single legs ahead of the tournament's finals stage.

Defending champions Al-Ahli are scheduled to take on Al-Duhail from Qatar while four-time champions Al-Hilal face Al-Sadd. Shabab Al-Ahli from the UAE plays Iran's Tractor FC and Al-Wahda meets Saudi Pro League champions Al-Ittihad.

Jeddah had already been scheduled to 'host' the quarterfinals, semifinals and final with matches running from 16 to 25 April. The last-16 matches on the Eastern side of the draw have already been played, with Japanese sides Vissel Kobe and Machida Zelvia joined in the quarterfinals by Thailand's Buriram United and Johor from Malaysia. —*PTI*

Aus' Ryan set to play for India in Asian Cup

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Australian-born forward Ryan Williams could make his much-anticipated India debut after being named in a 23-member squad for the AFC Asian Cup 2027 Qualifier against Hong Kong on 31 March in Kochi.

Williams was included in the squad after FIFA cleared his change of association, paving the way for the 31-year-old winger to represent India at the senior international level. He had earlier been part of India's preparatory camp for the Bangladesh qualifier but missed out on the lineup due to pending documentation. With all formalities now complete, he is in line to make his debut against Hong Kong.

Williams, whose mother hails from an Anglo-Indian family in Mumbai, will thus become only the second foreign-born footballer of Indian origin to play for the country after Japan-born Arata Izumi, who represented India between 2013 and 2014.

A versatile attacker currently playing for Indian Super League side Bengaluru FC, Williams relinquished his Australian passport last year to play for India.

Born in Perth in 1993, Williams began his professional journey in England after joining Portsmouth's academy in 2010. He broke into the senior side a year later, making his debut against Middlesbrough, before going on to have stints with clubs such as Fulham and Barnsley.

On the international stage, Australian-born forward Ryan Williams represented Australia at the youth level, featuring in the 2012 AFC U-19 Championship and 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup. —*PTI*

- Williams, whose mother hails from an Anglo-Indian family in Mumbai, will thus become only the second foreign-born footballer of Indian origin to play for the country after Japan-born Arata Izumi, who represented India between 2013 and 2014.

Uncapped Anushka included in India's squad for SA T20s

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Anushka Sharma on Tuesday received her maiden India call-up for the five-match away T20I series against South Africa beginning on 17 April.

Durban, Johannesburg and Benoni will host the series.

Sharma was signed by Gujarat Giants for Rs 45 lakh ahead of the WPL 2026 where she made an instant impact with the bat. The 22-year-old was part of the India A squad that featured in the Rising Stars Asia Cup in Bangkok last month.

From the squad that featured in the 2-1 win over Australia, Sneha Rana, Amanjot Kaur, G Kamalini and Vaishnavi Sharma don't find a place for the South Africa series.

Pacer Kashvee Gautam, who has played Test and ODIs for India, has been included in the T20 squad led by Harmanpreet Kaur.

The series is part of India's preparations for T20 World Cup in the UK in June-July.

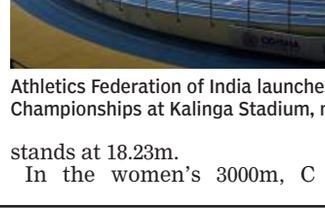
Squad Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (WK), Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Thakur, Kranti Gaud, Sree Charani, Shreyanka Patil, Kashvee Gautam, Bharti Fulmali, Uma Chetry (WK), Anushka Sharma. —*PTI*

Indians set for Shotgun World Cup

TANGIER, 24 MARCH

Bhowneesh Mendiratta will aim to put the Paris Olympics heartbreak behind him, and kick off the year on a high as he leads the Indian charge at the season-opening ISSF Shotgun World Cup.

Trap marksman Bhowneesh, who had secured India's first quota for the Paris Olympics but missed out in the trials, will be keen to hit the ground running in Tangier as the qualification cycle for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics gets underway this year. Mendritta has an eye on a busy calendar culminating in the Asian Games and the World Championships, later this year.



The 46-year-old, currently ranked fourth in the world by the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), faces a tricky path to the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya this September-October, as team selection for the continental event requires participation in World Cups, meaning skipping them could jeopardise his qualification despite being India's top trap shooter.

In women's trap, Olympian Rajeshwari Kumari remains one of India's most experienced shooters, but her results over the years suggest she hasn't yet stepped up to the next level.

India is sending a 12-member squad for trap and skeet. across the men's and women's events, along with two trap mixed teams, supported by a foreign coaches. —*PTI*

INITIAL HICCUPS

National Indoor Championships see a messy start

BHUBANESWAR, 24 MARCH

Athletes and officials faced a steep learning curve at the inaugural National Indoor Championships, adapting to unfamiliar indoor conditions.

Young shot putter Omkar Prasad Nanda, who won U-20 gold with 17.77m, highlighted challenges of the wooden, potentially slippery throwing circle compared to cement outdoors. Training at the venue for 10–14 days helped him adjust, while he opted for worn-out shoes for better grip. "There's no wind support indoors, but technique remains the same," he said. His outdoor personal best stands at 18.23m.

Athletics Federation of India launches inaugural National Indoor Championships at Kalinga Stadium, marking a new era for the sports—*PTI*

In the women's 3000m, C Priyanka clocked 9:42.05 to win gold, crediting past training on 200m tracks in Bengaluru for helping her adapt to tighter curves. She noted indoor middle-distance racing demands patience, tactics and timed acceleration, with runners typically avoiding outer sloped lanes.

- Athletics Federation of India officials termed the event as a learning experience. Treasurer Stanley Jones said indoor competitions offer controlled conditions without weather disruptions but present logistical challenges.

Officials from the Athletics Federation of India also described the event as a learning experience. Treasurer Stanley Jones said indoor competitions offer controlled conditions without weather disruptions but present logistical challenges due to limited space and tightly scheduled events.

Shot put measurement posed unique issues, as landing mats replace sand, leaving only temporary depressions to judge impact points. Moisture and chalk marks can aid visibility.

The event is using specialised mats and portable wooden circles supplied by Malaysia's AFN Sports. —*PTI*